PROTOPRESBYTER
STEPHANOS K. ANAGNOSTOPOULOS

EXPERIENCES
DURING THE DIVINE LITURGY

PIRAEUS 2010

Experiences
during the Divine Liturgy

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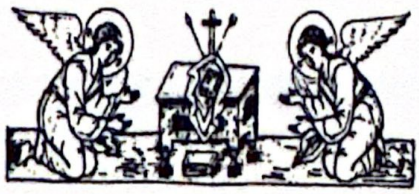
AN INTERPRETATION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY BASED ON ACTUAL EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES OF HOLY PRIESTS, MONKS AND LAY PEOPLE



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Dedicated with gratitude

❖ *To the very reverend and holy Geronda*
Arch. Father Ephraim Philotheiti
whom I have known for more than forty years
the loving-caring father,
the unerring guide,
the discerning Spiritual Father,
the good shepherd,
the mellifluous teacher of the word,
the tireless worker of the spirit,
the imitator of Christ who maintains
orthodox teaching in the Church.

❖ *To the Orthodox clergymen*
of every level all over the world
who bear the priesthood of Christ and preserve
"His sacred inheritance" blameless and intact.

❖ *To my most beloved*
companion Heleni presbytera
together with our children and grandchildren.

PREFACE

BY MY GERONDA ARCHM. FATHER EPHRAIM

The Divine Liturgy, what a splendor, indeed! Man has been honored by God in such a way that He Himself came down to earth with His Angelic Orders, every time there is a Liturgy, in order to nurture man with His Most Holy Body and His Most Precious Blood! For He has given us everything; is there anything physical or spiritual, perishable or everlasting that has not been offered to us? None! Is there anything superior to His Most Holy Body and Blood, which is given to us on a daily basis? There is certainly not. God has enabled man, who is of soil and dirt, to serve the Divine Liturgy. So Priceless is the Divine Love that just a tiny drop exceeds any global, physical and secular love.

Adam and Eve's sin was the starting point of all the distressing events that have occurred to this day and of those that will occur 'til the end of time. Disobedience, like a sperm inside Eve's womb, gave birth to and transmitted physical and spiritual death to all of humanity. Poor Eve, could there have been a way for her to see that "the split second" taste of the fruit would cause such turmoil thus compelling thus the Holy Trinity to have a "co entreaty" so that the one Person of the Life-Giving Trinity would be sent to the world and endure, by the works of His Hands, blows, insults, whipping, spitting as well as all kinds of obscenity and ultimately be hung on the Cross as a curse! "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree".[1]

The sweet redemption, of our Jesus, the light of our troubled souls, His Passion and Life-Giving Resurrection are re-enacted in every Divine Liturgy through which every sinful soul is delivered. Great, indeed, is Jesus' Love for us! For He took on our human nature and was hung on the Cross giving us freedom and thus clearing-off all our debts towards our Heavenly Father. And as our beloved brother He makes us worthy of His co-inheritance which consists of the infinite riches of His Heavenly Father. And if during the time when the law, which existed before Christ, had overshadowed things, the blood of oxen and goats as well as a calf's embers purified those who had partaken of them, how much more so let alone Christ's Most Holy Blood, from the Holy Altar of the Holy Churches of God which is partaken thereof, will cleanse us from sin and warm up our souls in order to receive the divine love of our most sweet Jesus. The Lamb which was slaughtered

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[1] Gal. 3,13

for our personal salvation will rinse us with His most Precious Blood from the filth of our sins and give us eternal rest!

In any case, we owe it to ourselves to become partakers of this heavenly banquet which offers us this most wonderful Mystery of the Holy Altar! Once inside the Church, we should stand in fear and devoutness since our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels is present. Those who are attentive and devout are filled with grace and blessings; however, those who are inattentive are condemned, being unworthy.

On the one hand, the Angels serve the Divine Liturgy and on the other, the faithful come to Church in order to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ - "Receive the Body of Christ and taste the fountain of immortality" so that they will live in Christ and not perish in sin. Thus, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup, for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself..."[1] For instance, when someone wants to appear before a king, it takes him days to get ready, in terms of general preparation, cleanliness, speech, manner, ethos etc., so that he would succeed in drawing the king's compassion and, in this way, have his desirable request granted; even though there is, no comparison as far as the two different kings are concerned, each believer should prior to Holy Communion prepare oneself in order to obtain divine mercy and forgiveness. Those who appear before a secular king are, most of the time, adorned by iniquity, flattery, pretence as well as deceit, in order to obtain that which is desired; nevertheless, the Christian believer who appears before the King of kings who in turn keeps an eye on the inner person must be adorned by holiness, humility and the sheer ethos of the soul that is more precious than lost gold.

The Lord created His Church on earth as a Bride, so that She would intercede for His children. He left us the Great Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, in order to be cleansed, become holy and thus become one with God. He has invited us all; some in their childhood, others in their middle as well as old age. As Good as He is He took hold of us, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings in order to make us partakers of His divine Kingdom. Nothing repelled Him, no ulcer, no wound, no illness, not even the deformity of spiritual phenomena which may characterize our soul. As a father He accepted us, as a mother He breast - fed us, and as an unmercenary doctor He took care of us and clothed us in the garment of adoption, and grace therefore ignoring the heavy debt of our trespasses. So, we owe Him infinite love and worship. Love should remain in the heart like a life-giving source, gushing forth springs of communion wine and streams of Divine eros.

We should be partakers of the Sacrifice of the Slaughtered Lamb as often as we can, and as long as we are free to do so, since Holy Communion is a

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[1] I Cor.11,28-29

great aid for the believer which in turn helps him to fight sin. Also, we should approach this divine Mystery in a spirit of compunction, crushed hearts, and a good sense of our sins. Great is the mercy of God Who condescends to enter into us; not abhorring the multitude of our sins. Nonetheless, due to His infinite love and affection we are sanctified, in this way we are made worthy to become His children and co-heirs of His Kingdom. Hence, let us prepare with a pure conscience aiming at the fortification of our senses, and in chastity let us enter along with the Holy Apostles in the Mystical Supper and partake of our sweet Jesus so that He should dwell with us unto the infinite ages of ages.

Unworthy as I am, I serve my Lord. A ministry rendered that is holy and mighty. Everyday I offer God a well-pleasing sacrifice, the Lamb of God, Immaculate to His Immaculate Father and God, in order that he might be Merciful, for the things with which we sadden the most good God. He whom we cause grief and Who sacrificed His only begotten Son. My God, Your most beloved Son for our sake! And who are we to deserve this ultimate sacrifice! "For being enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son...".[1]

It is a fact that numerous interpretations of the Divine Liturgy which were mainly based on the enlightenment and Grace of the Holy Spirit, were handed on to us by the Church Fathers. What makes this current analysis of my spiritual child Father Stephanos Anagnostopoulos, of the Divine Liturgy noteworthy as well as beneficial, is the fact that it is offered through the experiences and revelations of worthy Liturgists of the Most High, older and more recent ones.

I, as well as its author, wish that this book will lead us all to the genuine liturgical conscience and life in order to urge us in a spirited way, as grateful servants to try to rest the heart of His feelings so that He will be comforted, according to the Psalter: "...and because of His servants shall He be comforted".[2] May we sense that which God offered us and thus rejoice in the beauty of His eros. Amen

The most unworthy of all
+ Father Ephraim

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[1] Rom. 5,10

[2] Psalm 134,14

INTRODUCTION

Those who attend services at Saint Barbara's Church in the area of Amphiali which is located in Keratsini, a suburb of Piraeus, where I am a priest, know that pious readers have asked me repeatedly to give talks which would be based on the interpretation of the Divine Liturgy.

Bearing in mind that I lack the ability to give sermons and also that my word is very poor, awkward and full of mistakes, I was reluctant to accept such a venture. Nevertheless, years later, after having gathered many valuable and remarkable study aids, I dared to embellish the already existing interpretations with the charismatic participation in the dread Mysteries of the bloodless Sacrifice of Christ, assured by the infallible, experience which was made known to me by certain pure and unblemished souls or by the study of related facts.

Thus, the first vespers' sermon was held in October 1992 and the last in May 1995. As a result, fifty-two sermons were gathered and taped.

These sermons were aimed to guide the people of God in order to urge them to participate in the Mystery of Communion with Jesus Christ our Savior which would ultimately transfigure and lead man to deification.

In order to emphasize the unrivalled greatness of the Divine Liturgy and reward the faithful, not just as mere people attending the church services but also as partakers of the Life-Giving Cup, I tried to refer to occurrences which are related either in a direct or an indirect way to the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Such experiences were taken from the Gerontikon or the book entitled "Sayings of the desert Fathers", the Life of the Saints as well as what was mentioned to me by great spiritual fathers and holy ascetic - priests, by blessed and humble priests in the world, by Athonite monks and finally by simple, yet pious Christian believers.

These liturgical attestations of priests but of every rank who are striving for their faith and also of simple Christians - known and unknown - who are full of Grace were 'sealed' by experienced Spirituals Fathers to avoid the trap of a diabolic illusion, pseudo- transformations, pseudo-circumstances, pseudo-hallucinations, and imagination. Therefore, the former were considered to be the major elements upon which the sermons of the unrivalled richness and interpretation of the Divine Liturgy were based on.

The pious readers will note that these true stories refer to special, overwhelming instances that took place in the Divine Liturgy, particularly during The Cherubic hymn, The Small and Great Entrance, The Consecration of the Holy Gifts, or Holy Communion. Thus, it was necessary that they be included in the interpretation aiming exclusively at benefiting the hearts of

listeners - readers regardless of what part of the Divine Liturgy was being analyzed each time.

It was noted, from the very first sermon, that these true stories increased the listeners' attention and as a result piety as well as the fear of God towards the most magnificent Mystery, that of the Divine Liturgy was strengthened even more. Therefore, their preparation to partake Holy Communion turned out to be spiritually more profound. All the sermons were taped, became known and were at the faithful disposal.

Shortly after, many priests and faithful Christians suggested that they be published. I did not even dare to consider it. In the end, after a seven - year delay, I compromised and so these sermons were transcribed and published in this volume. Their written version is one and the same with the tone expressed in the oral speech that of the holy sermon, along with the necessary corrections that were made by theologians, philologists and other godly souls. I would like to express my warmest thanks for all their effort, which is beyond measure, and wish that their hearts may receive God's saving gifts in abundance.

After a period of ten years approximately during which these sermons had already began, I was notified by priests and faithful Christians about extraordinary as well as great incidents, similar to those mentioned in the sermons, many of which I thought worthy of being included in this edition because they enrich it even more.

Since many souls benefited a great deal just by listening to these sermons because they were able to have an even deeper understanding - as much as that was possible - of the greatness of the Divine Liturgy, therefore, today I proceed with their publication wishing wholeheartedly and in a spirit of humility that even a few souls may benefit from the written version of these sermons presented in this book.

We would like to apologize for whatever was omitted or for anything that might be considered as excessive. Our aim was and is the benefit of merely one soul, especially that of a priest.

Written on the 31st of August 2002,
Feast of the commemoration of the Deposition of the Belt
Of the Theotokos

The wretched "earth and ashes"
+ Father Stephanos

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE DIVINE LITURGY

Who is the one who performs the Divine Liturgy when it is held? Is it the priest or all of us together? All of us together: the people of God and the priest.

On the one hand the Church is the mystical Body of the God-Man Christ, and on the other we all are its members, clergy and laity. The Church as the Body of Christ prays for the whole world. She cares about people's salvation. However, She celebrates the Divine Liturgy only in the presence of its faithful Christians, in other words of those who have received Holy Baptism and Holy Chrism. They make up the members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. They make up the people of God.

The Divine Liturgy is the public worship of all the faithful. This act of worshipping is offered by the people of God and the Celebrant Priest, towards God. Its divine gift as well as its saving fruit, in other words the redeeming Sacrifice, is geared for us all who make up the people of God. Thus, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated by the people of God for the people of God: by us and for us.

Therefore, the people of God are **both** the priests **and** the faithful Christians, the laity. We priests never celebrate the Liturgy alone, mystically. What I mean by that is that the priest cannot celebrate the Divine Liturgy and say "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." and later say "Amen." To say "In peace, let us pray to the Lord" and then respond "Lord, have mercy" there must be at least one more person. There must be at least two: one that would celebrate the Liturgy and one that would represent the people.

We are not mere spectators when there is a Divine Liturgy and we are in the Church. We may be spectators when we are at a soccer match or when we stand in front of the television set. In the Divine Liturgy we are by no means spectators. All of us not only liturgize but we are being liturgized as well.

This is why we are also responsible. Like the priest is responsible for the way in which he stands in front of the Holy Altar, in exactly the same

way the laity are responsible for the way in which they stand inside the Church Temple.

As God's people, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy but through the priests and bishops who have received the Grace of Priesthood after their ordination. Nevertheless, laity and clergy, who are in fact Ministers of the Most High, are two different types of people as far as their role in the Church is concerned.

Of course, the laity participates, as it has received the Holy Baptism, in the Lord's triple high office. In this way, they also partake of the Hierarchical status of Christ the Savior. The holy Apostle Peter refers to this status as the "royal priesthood"[1]; this is also mentioned by Saint Basil the Great. The laity however is not ordained and thus is not clergy. Therefore, there is a clear distinction between clergy and laity.

The priests are reasoble shepherds who shepherd the Church of Christ while the laity are the reasoble sheep in the fold of Christ who are being shepherd. The priest as the Liturgist of the Most High celebrates the Most Immaculate Mysteries, and at the same time is a member of the Body of Christ. All of us together are members of Christ. We are also members of one another, the people of God, the Church and Body of Christ.

1. After 1815, Milos was the ruler and king of Serbia. One Sunday morning he went to the palace's chapel with his family.

That particular Sunday however, the regular priest was not the one to celebrate the Liturgy due to the fact that he was very old and ill; instead a thirty-year old newly-ordained priest was to celebrate. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the Priest distributed the antidoron.

The king, who was old, was the first one to come forth. As the priest was distributing the antidoron he withdrew his hand so that the king would not kiss it.

Then the old king gave him an austere look and said: "Give me your hand, father and do not withdraw it next time since it is not your hand I am kissing but that of the Priesthood; I venerate and kiss Christ's Priesthood which is greater than you and me".[2]

This real incident has a lot to teach us: Firstly, that a priest's ministry is great. Secondly, that we should respect and honor it and thirdly, that we cannot perform Mysteries without a celebrant priest.

The celebrant priest's priesthood is not his own, but he bears, in his soul, in his whole being the Priesthood of Christ. With whose Grace he teaches, ministers, shepherds the people of God, heals and administers "as one having authority".

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[1] I Pet. 2,9

[2] Kantiotis Aug., Metropolitan of Florina, *The Divine Liturgy*, issue A, Athens 1989, p.50

In order for us to constitute the Church of Christ, there should definitely be a priest and the Divine Liturgy. Without these two fundamentals we are not a Church, but merely a secular, philanthropic association, any organization whatsoever, like the Protestants.

In conclusion: When we say Church we mean: the laity, the Celebrant Priests and the Holy Altar, in other words the Divine Liturgy.

The Divine Liturgy was thought and created neither by laity nor by the Apostles. For that reason, it is a great, incomprehensible, inexpressible, unrivaled, most divine **Mystery**, which was instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself during Great and Holy Thursday. Accordingly, the Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy thus continuing this immaculate Mystery.

The Holy Eucharist is also a **Sacrifice** through which the bloodless Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross continues. Since we are the people of God we are all partakers, clergy and laity. Thus, the Divine Liturgy is, in addition, **a Communion of Faithful**, a Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

In Father Iakovos Tsalikis' biography, one of his spiritual children who is also a University professor (the former was the abbot of Saint David's Monastery), mentions the following occurrence:

"He saw and touched the Most Holy Blood of Christ".

2. The greatest and most magnificent miracle, which was offered to him by God occurred on November 22nd 1975, in the morning. He was so much overwhelmed by this miracle that he kept note of it and it was found later on, following his death in one of his notebooks. The note starts with the above date and includes exactly the following: "On Saturday November 22nd in the morning during Holy Proskomedia, after commemorating and during the time when I was about to cover the Holy Gifts I saw in real life - and in all holiness I must admit - a piece of dry Blood, which I then touched with my finger. There was Blood on my finger! When I called the monk of the Holy Monastery, the monk-priest Father Seraphim and I told him what had happened he replied: "Father, we cannot see anything, but did you see what it is?" I then replied that I believe and worship God Himself Who is Present. I said "Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy, three times.

+ Archmindrite Iakovos[1]

Father Anthony Tsigas experienced a similar miracle. Father Anthony was a priest at the Church of Prophet Elijah in the area of Kastella located

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[1] Papadopoulos Styl., *The Departed Iakovos Tsalikis*, Athens, 1994, p.111

in Piraeus, when the deceased Metropolitan of Piraeus, Chrysostom Tavladorakis was still alive.

3. One Saturday morning, as Father Anthony was performing the Divine Liturgy he reached the point where he had to Consecrate the Holy Gifts. As he was on bended knees saying the Prayer, his hands were leaning on the Holy Table. During the moment when he was about to get up in order to bless the Precious Gifts, a drop of Blood falls on his hand from up high; in fact, It spattered him!

He was in a state of terror when he saw It! Terrified as he was, he was looking at It and then he was captured by holy awe, fear; he was ecstatic and astonished, in other words he experienced various mixed, incomprehensible feelings that could not of course be described by Father Anthony. As soon as he got up he did not know what to do! He licked the Blood of Christ..., he did not know what had come over him. Nevertheless, the Grace of our Holy God, after this miracle, made him look at the Holy Chalice only to realize that It was empty! He had forgotten to fill it with wine. Next, when he looked at the Body he saw that It was in fact unpierced. That is to say, he had not completed the Holy Proskomedia.

The chanter continued chanting "We hymn Thee, we bless Thee..." the priest told him to continue with a nod (there were not as many people since it was Saturday), he got the Holy Spear, pierced the Holy Bread and said: "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water". Afterwards he filled the Holy Cup, then poured the wine and water, as usual, blessed it, made the sign of the Cross and after having completed all this, he was on bended knees once again in order to read the Consecration Prayer, got up blessed the Precious Gifts and our All-Holy God transformed the bread and wine - the way it is done every time there is a Divine Liturgy- into the Body and Blood of Christ. Following the Consecration at the end of the Divine Liturgy, he consumed the Holy Cup cleaning it entirely.

Immediately after the Divine Liturgy which was held on a Saturday, he told Metropolitan Chrysostom all about his experience. The latter then took Father Anthony's hand so that he could smell it. It had an inexpressible sweet-smelling savor! He took it and started kissing it many times.

-My Bishop! Says Father Anthony.

-I am not kissing your own hand he said, even though it should also be kissed, for you are a Celebrant of the Most High. It does not matter if you are a priest and I a bishop. I have touched in your hand the Blood of God, the Blood of God!!!

I recall that after Father Anthony's falling asleep the bishop nar-

rated the story to me. Since the bishop was very expressive, he stood up and said:

-Father Stephanos, the BLOOD OF CHRIST!!!

And started crying!

All this takes place during the Divine Liturgy![1]

I will not make the attempt to solve liturgical or historical problems. Instead, we will all make the effort to comprehend, live and experience the Divine Liturgy.

Saint John of Damascus tells us that the Divine Liturgy is also called **Holy Communion** since we are partakers of the Divinity of Jesus Christ. He nevertheless calls it **Holy Communion** as we partake of Jesus Christ's Flesh and Divinity.[2] Thus, the faithful experience the Divine Liturgy (when they partake of the Immaculate Mysteries) **both** as Holy Communion **and** Divine Partaking. In what way is this realized? It is not easy to specify 'how' it is done. There are difficulties which many times prove to be insurmountable.

That which worthy priests who perform the Liturgy and those who are worthy partakers in Holy Communion experience, cannot be expressed, or described or even exposed. He cannot utter it in words or write it on a piece of paper. Father Iakovos' overwhelming experience was included in three lines. Whatever one experiences cannot be said for it cannot be expressed in words. As a result, there is danger of the truth being void, the truth of the great Mystery, which is not to be found neither in words, in poetic expressions, nor in other features that we would use, but in the unapproachable **OCCURRENCE of the Conversion of the Precious Gifts, of the bread and wine, into Body and Blood of Christ**. Words diminish the worthiness of the event itself...However this event is experienced psychosomatically:

- **depending on the spirituality of the believer**
- **depending on their faith**
- **depending on their cleanliness**
- **depending on their state of repentance**

Have you, have I really repented? How much devoutness characterizes us? How many tears have we shed? That which God sees, not that which people see or that which you think you have! No! those things which God sees!

- **And of course depending on the true longing which character-**

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Saint John of Damascus, *A concrete publication of the Orthodox Faith*, Pournaras publications, Thessalonica 1976, p.375

izes the believer who wants to partake of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

Man as a whole participates in the Divine Worship:

- the body and soul,
- the mind and the bones,
- the heart and the five senses,
- even the inward parts!

4. A priest once told me what he had experienced following the Consumption of the Holy Gifts. What an experience! He felt his whole chest and heart being transformed in a remarkable way into a vast heaven! At the center there was the Lord on His throne, on His right His All-Blameless Most Holy Mother, and surrounding His Throne were all the Prophets, the Righteous, the Forefathers, the Apostles, the Hierarchs, the Holy Patriarchs, the worthy priests and monks, the endless host of Martyrs, the Saints who shone in the ascetic life, the God-bearing Fathers of the Ecumenical Synods, the unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian, the Saints who in the world excelled in their faith towards God, the numerous Angelic hosts of the Archangels, the Cherubim, the Seraphim, Thrones, Dominions...(What can I say?!) He saw Brigades escorting the Lord, the Saints, heaven, all the people, the Church, everything!

And underneath all those who have been mentioned, he saw tens of thousands of souls who have fallen asleep and souls who are living!

He experienced everything with his soul and his body which commenced from his chest, like he said, a vast heaven, in other words the joy and pleasure of Heaven. He stood there wiping the Holy Chalice with the Communion Cloth. That is when he felt and experienced it.[1]

Actually, these are neither mere words nor phrases, but a fact, a reality that was experienced by the priest. Nevertheless, he could not talk about it. He narrated it the way I described it, roughly. Yet, these words, emptied, lessened this reality. An actual earthquake, which shocked and deeply touched this priest, had taken place inside him. In order to have a better understanding, we should take into consideration that each spiritual state that is experienced by a faithful Christian cannot be comprehended by someone unless they have had a similar experience, especially when this means refers to transcendent dealing spiritual states that have a 'language of their own.

Many might misunderstand, doubt, have a certain disbelief, or express their objection whenever they hear of such incidents or miracles, or even of a psychosomatic transformation that occurred with the Grace of God, for the descriptions are so poor that they succeed in 'evacuating' the truth as well

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[1] Personal notes

as subtracting reality from the incident itself. Nevertheless, we should not doubt or show disbelief since these things do actually happen.

5. A relative of mine told me the following incident: A friend of his who was a doctor, during his childhood like all the other children who laugh and move aimlessly here and there inside the Church Temple without realizing it, was also laughing with his cousin teasing the other children and running here and there. Even though the Liturgy had finished, they had taken the antidoron and the people had already left, however these two children and the doctor along with his cousin started being naughty inside the Church Temple. That is when an austere and at the same time sweet woman's voice was heard telling them:

- In my Son's house we do not play! We do not run here and there. We pray, we receive Holy Communion and partake of His Body and Blood. The Blood of my Son!

And... She grabs them by the neck and in a split of a second both children were outdoors, in the Church's yard!

The doctor then replies: "Just let them come to me and tell me that there is or there is not a God. God spoke to me through His All-Holy Mother."[1]

Thus, we conclude that we can only experience incidents not describe them. Nevertheless, when we enter the place where the Divine Liturgy is performed we should dare describe and analyze. The matters pertaining to the Divine Liturgy are one the most difficult ones, even though we consider them very familiar to us.

When we see the priest passing in front of us holding the Gospel book, preceded by the servers and the candle bearer, don't we know that this is called "The Little Entrance"? Since it is known to us, is it necessary to hear it from someone? That which seems easy to us as far as its description is concerned, is in fact very difficult to comprehend during the Divine Liturgy but also to teach it as an event for there is an event in the way the priest moves, for example.

Inside the Holy Church Temple whatever is being said or chanted, whatever we hear, see, smell, whatever illuminates, is not just a mere symbol, or simple words and sounds or even simple little flames that light up the candles and the vigil lamps. There is essence in everything for they

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[1] Personal notes

express overwhelming events whose depth is inconceivable, incomprehensible. We cannot feel it spiritually or touch it physically.

Thus, as we proceed in the interpretation of the Divine Liturgy on the one hand, we will refer to the Holy Church Temple and that which takes place but on the other hand, we will not make theological dissertations or historical analyses. In fact we will humbly make the effort to teach and to be taught. I am the first one who needs to be taught. I am the first one who needs to be prayed for. Therefore, do not forget about me.

The main event in the Divine Liturgy is one: the **MIRACLE**. The miracle as far as the Holy Conversion of the Precious Gifts is concerned. However, this miracle especially is expressed only through silence.

Those of us who are worthy of partaking of the common Cup of the Holy Body and Blood do we understand that we are in communion with one another and united "in faith"? If so, to what extent do we comprehend it? Can we describe or even utter in words what we have felt and experienced?

What we dare say or whatever God makes us worthy of saying - since we need to have the audacity to talk about divine things - will be based on the Church Fathers as well as the Holy Bible. In this way, the Holy Tradition will go on, because the Divine Liturgy truly follows the Tradition of the Church. Tradition, which is in fact difficult to define and describe, is seen as a perceptible reality in the Divine Liturgy. Of course, not in the luxurious vestments or the Byzantine splendor but in that which is performed, uttered and chanted in the never - ending spirit of communion and unity among the faithful, as members of the Body of the Church of Christ. There is a reason behind each word that is being uttered in the Divine Liturgy. Nothing remains unnoticed, not one movement, not one touch or blessing but everything comprises a mystical - spiritual dialogue made up of sounds, movements and light all of which enter deeply the heart of the believer, as well as the one who attends any Church Service. For instance:

- the lifting of the Gospel book
- the words "Blessed is the Kingdom"
- the words "Wisdom. Stand upright"
- the priest's words "Peace be to all"
- the bowing of the head ("let us bow our heads unto the Lord...")
- the censing
- the sign of the Cross
- the word "Amen" (how great its thunder is!)
- the Little and Great Entrance
- the holy vessels and veils or covers
- the Iconostasis, the throne
- the holy and humble chanting
- the joyous light coming from the candles and the vigil lamps

All these, in their own mystical way speak, teach and guide the hearts of both the faithful and that of the Celebrant Priest. Whatever, therefore, occurs, is said and heard in the Divine Liturgy ought to help our heart look towards this real and true event, so that it may be given, "be enslaved" to the Conversion of the Precious Gifts and not the priest's figure.

Christ is not hidden in the Precious Gifts (He is not concealed or simply found inside, nor is bread and wine mere symbols of the Body and Blood of Christ, as the Protestants claim) moreover, it is not a simple but a mystical union of each believer's soul with Jesus Christ. No! I could shout a thousand times: no! In the real and true Conversion **CHRIST** and only Christ is present! That is why we say "we eat and drink" and thus we become **of one body, of one blood** as well as **Christ bearers** and we are along with Jesus Christ whom we receive in us, of one body and of one blood. We have the God-man Lord Jesus Christ "who abides in us together with the Father and the Holy Spirit", as **Saint Basil the Great** confirms in one of his Liturgical Prayers.

As a matter of fact, our eyes might see the bread and wine and our tongue taste the bread and wine neverthelless, things are not the way they seem. I will dare say: there are many who have not chewed, eaten, and swallowed bread and wine but the Body and Blood, the Flesh and Blood of Christ, which is followed by an endless exaltation of their soul and generally a psychosomatic transformation which can only be made possible through the Holy Spirit.

From the moment the Holy Spirit comes down upon us and celebrates the Most Immaculate Mystery, what we see and taste before us is what we actually believe in, what we venerate, what we worship; the true and real deified Body and Blood of Christ.

6. There once lived in a Roumanian monastery a very graceful priest, Father Minas who later became Saint Minas. After the Divine Liturgy he used to go for a walk to the woods, since the monastery was located in the woods, in order to rest. There he chanted and glorified God with Resurrectional troparia and many more.

Then the birds in the woods would surround him: they would sit on his head, shoulders, hands, he on the other hand would caress them in a tenderly manner. Most of the time, while Father Minas was chanting the birds would fall silent and just listen to him.

Since the Liturgy started at night and finished at daybreak, until he finished reading the Dismissal prayers and got undressed, it was already dawn, the sun would rise; thus he would go to the woods very early in the morning to enjoy nature with its birds. All of them together praised and glorified God.

During the last years of his life, people noticed that every time the Divine Liturgy had a festive character and it took longer to finish in

fact even longer after sun rise, the birds used to flock together on top of the Church!

During the Conversion of the Holy Gifts when the priest would say "Thine own of Thine own", all the birds on top of the Church would fall silent! Furthermore, when he said "especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate..."in Roumanian of course, and as the choir was chanting the megalynarion "It is meet indeed to bless Thee", the birds immediately started chirping! [1]

7. I was told by a faithful person a similar event which took place in the Church of Panagia Ekatondapiliani, situated in Paros. This event occurred during the Divine Liturgy on the Eve of Theophany the year 1998.

Hundreds of sparrows and other kinds of birds were flying in and out of the Church, from the open windows of the dome, chirping and chirping lively. However during the Consecration of the Holy Gifts they once again fell silent and all of them stood still so that they would restart following the appointed megalynarion "Especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate..." [2]

The reality of the Conversion of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ testify Christ's own words in the Mystical Supper, on Holy and Great Thursday night: "This is my body... this is my blood..."[3] Thus, divine is the institution of the Mystery for it was introduced by Christ Himself.

The points of this most divine Mystery that are perceived by the senses are: the leavened bread, the wine and Prayer: "send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here spread forth..."During the Holy Eucharist not only is the Grace of Christ being transmitted, as in the case of other Mysteries but also **Christ Himself, the Lord Himself!!!** Through the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, the worthy partaker, who is also a faithful Christian, becomes of one body with Christ; he in fact is of one body and of one blood with Christ. With Baptism one is integrated into the Body of the Church, and is thus called **"man's incorporation"**, and is completed through the Holy Eucharist, thus they are **"made one body with Christ"**. This means that our whole being receives Life itself, our Lord and Redeemer in a mystical way, and is made one body with Him.

We will try to put all this information down on paper as much as possi-

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[1] Balan Ioannikios Hieromartyr, *Rumanian Gerontikon*, Thessalonica 1985, p.34

[2] Personal notes

[3] Mark. 14, 22-24

ble and then transmit it to our hearts. Afterwards, there would be one thing left: to put theory into practice. We have work to do. We have spiritual labor. To become God - like!

"The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" [1] our Lord Jesus Christ, is placed in the center of the holy Diskos. The All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos is placed beside the Lamb on the left (as we look at the holy Diskos). The portions in memory of the nine orders of the Saints are placed beside the Lamb on the right (as we look at the holy Diskos). Next, in front of the Lamb, first we place the portion in memory of the bishop of the local Church and then the portions in memory of the living and of the departed. The following didactic story attests to something which is relevant.

8. There once lived a most devout priest; (this incident was narrated to me by the blessed departed Gerontas (Spiritual Elder) Gabriel, who for a great period of time was the Abbott at the Holy Monastery of Dionysios on Mount Athos). Even though he barely knew how to read and write, he was the priest, a clergyman of strong faith, great virtue and of many spiritual struggles. He used to stand up-right for hours during the Proskomedia, despite the fact that the veins of his feet had been affected and were hemorrhaging. There were times when one could see the blood running down since he was standing up-right commemorating the names of numerous people. He was a man of sacrifice to his last breath; in fact, his soul departed just after the Divine Liturgy.

As he barely knew how to read and write, by some misunderstanding he did not place the portions on the Holy Diskos properly.

When we place the portion of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos on top of the Holy Diskos, we say: "The queen stood at thy right hand..." The gerontas priest was under the impression that, since he said "at thy right hand", the portion of the All - Holy (Panagia) Mother of God must be placed on the right side of the Lamb (as he was looking at the Holy Diskos); in other words, he was placing the portions backwards.

Once a hierarch visited the Holy Monastery for the ordination of a deacon.

During the Psalms of Praise when the hierarch enters the Holy Altar, he vests, then later goes to the Proskomedia, which has already been prepared up to a certain point, from then on he alone, is the first one to continue commemorating.

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[1] Jn 1,29

Thus, the archpriest noticed that the portions had been placed backwards by the priest.

-You did not place the pieces properly, father, he told him. Father, come here for a minute. The All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos is placed over here and the Orders are placed over there. Hasn't anyone told you, hasn't anyone seen how you do the Proskomedia?

-Certainly, Your Eminence replied the geronta Priest. Every day, when I celebrate (for a day did not go by unless he celebrated the Divine Liturgy), the Angel who serves me sees what I am doing but does not tell me anything at all. I apologize, illiterate as I am, for making such a mistake; I will be careful from now on.

-Who did you say? Who did you say serves you here? Asked the bishop. Isn't he a monk who serves you?

-No, answered the priest, an Angel of the Lord.

The bishop fell silent, what could he have said, anyway?! He was astonished and had certainly realized that a holy priest was standing before him.

At noon, following the meal in the Trapeza (refectory of a monastic or parish community), the bishop said goodbye to the Abbott as well as the rest of the monks, and departed.

The following day, as it was still night, when the geronta Priest went to the Holy Altar in order to hold the Proskomedia the Angel of the Lord came down. During the act of breaking the Lamb, the Angel noticed that the priest had placed the portions properly.

-Fine, he told him, father! Now you have placed them properly!

-Yes, you knew the mistake I used to make for so many years! And why didn't you tell me anything, why didn't you correct me? He asked.

-I could see it, but I do not have the right to tell you anything. I am not worthy to correct a priest. God, the Angel continued, commands me to serve the priest. Only the bishop has the right to correct you![1]

And all day long we condemn priests, we judge them, we are busy gossiping about not only them but also about so many other things. Therefore, let us be careful from now on whenever we talk about a priest no matter who he is.

The central part of the Divine Liturgy is all about a great, unrivaled, unimaginable event of the Conversion of the bread and wine into the Body and the Blood of Christ. Thus we must accept it in silence. The chanters should fall silent for a while so we can receive the whole event within us, through this 'louder than words' silence. Since this silence, at the point where the bread and wine change into Christ's Body and Blood, more than anything else speaks in our hearts.

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[1] Personal notes

The Divine Liturgy is also a **Sacrifice**. It is this same Sacrifice which was done for us by the Lord, offering Himself "for the salvation of the world". That night, during the Mystical Supper, Christ clearly stressed and literally meant it: "this is my body..."(When He gave them the bread) and "this is my blood..."(When He gave them the cup with the wine).[1] Next, He commanded His Students: "this do in remembrance of me".[2]

Hence, the Church for the past two thousand years with Christ's command celebrates the Divine Liturgy and continues to offer the same sacrifice - bloodless- and the same Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, the same! In the Lord's words "do this in remembrance of me" lies the continuation of His Sacrifice and the communion of His Body and Blood. In other words, the Divine Liturgy or Holy Eucharist is not only **Sacrifice and remembrance** of the Mystical Supper, but also **Communion of the faithful**, for we receive Holy Communion from the same holy Cup; therefore, among us there is one communion. We are members of one another.

Communion of the faithful means that the Church celebrates the Divine Liturgy and continues the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ in order for us to receive communion of His Body and His Blood.

When we talk about the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we mean: His Death on the Cross and His most glorified Resurrection on the third day. Priests read a liturgical Prayer which says: "we do show the Lord's death and confess His Resurrection". And when we priests with great reverence and care, break the portions of the Lamb sealed NI and KA into small pieces, placing them in the chalice along with the portions of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos and those of the Saints (we, in other words perform a sistole of the Holy Gifts), we say "In that we have beheld the Resurrection of Christ..." We were not present when Christ was Resurrected; nonetheless, we are present in this resurrection, of which we have a foretaste, each time we partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ "unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting". The phrase "unto life everlasting" foretells our own resurrection.

When our Lord instituted the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist in the Mystical Supper (that of Holy and Great Thursday), He spoke not only about His Death on the Cross but also about His Resurrection: about His Most Holy Body, which would die on the Holy Cross, and about His Holy Blood, which would stream down His Side. Moreover, He spoke about the Body which he had taken on during His incarnation as Jesus Christ who was God-man (Theanthropos) and which in three days would also resurrect incorruptibly, immortally and eternally. That is the Body which is offered "for the nourishment of the faithful, unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting".

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[1] Mark. 14,22-24

[2] Luk. 22,19

We cannot imagine what actually takes place during the Divine Liturgy. What we experience will be based on our faith, our cleanliness and above all the gift of the Grace of our Holy God.

When we come to the Divine Liturgy we should come like the tax collector and the sinful woman who has been the topic of hymnology in the Church particularly in the hymns referring to the Passion that of Holy and Great Tuesday night (in fact Saint Kassiani has dedicated the hymn of praise: "The woman who had fallen into many sins, perceiving Thy divinity, O Lord fulfilled the part of myrrh-bearer...). What was it that the sinful woman offered? The most precious thing she could, the most precious thing she has in her possession, myrrh.

What about us, what are we to offer our All-Holy God? What are we to bring when we come to Church? This is what we ought to bring: Repentance, devoutness, sorrow, mourning, and the hidden tears of our souls with which we will cleanse the person of our soul and at the same time soak our cheeks, our clothes as well as the place where we are standing. This is when our whole being glows in His Grace. That is why we say that this cleansing of the soul and preparation are evident. God can see all of it; man can either barely see anything or nothing at all. In any case, no one can hide from God.

First and foremost, we need to have repentance, sorrow and awareness of our sinfulness. We will not attend the Divine Liturgy like the Pharisee. We will not say I am not "as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers...".[1] We will not say: I follow the commandments, "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess", I pray day and night, I also give money or help people who are poor, sick, and in difficulties... as well as others things that could be stated by each and every one of us. Nevertheless, we shall come "as the publican". We will be saying: "God be merciful to me a sinner". And in spirit (in a noetic way), within us, we shall beat our chest. We need not beat our chest in the exterior, for we are in public and in common Divine Worship. Thus, we shall not pay attention to the person standing next to us, in terms of what they are wearing, how they are behaving, not even if they are crying, sighing, kneeling, making the sign of the Cross ten or fifty times. We shall only pay attention to what we are doing. Precisely like the "sinful woman", who offered the myrrh, but unlike the traitor who offered the kiss. The sinful woman on the one hand gained Paradise, while the other one, the Disciple, lost it.

In this way, during the Divine Liturgy we shall live all the events of our Lord on earth as well as the Mystery of His Divine Dispensation, that which begins from the creation of the world, with the proemial psalm which is chanted during Vespers, the one that precedes and continues on not only to

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[1] Luk. 18,11-13

the Second Coming of our Lord, not only to His fearful Judgment and the separation of the sheep from the goats, but also to the eternal glory of the future of those whose souls have been elected. All these are experienced by humans, Orthodox Christians, during the Divine Liturgy, especially when they receive Holy Communion. So, they also live the Resurrection.

During the time when we partake of the Most Holy Body and the Most Precious Blood of Christ from the Holy Spoon which touches our lips, it is that moment when our mouth resembles Mount Sinai, which was shaking as the 'Dekalogue' (Ten Commandments) was handed over on the stones of the Law. If there was an earthquake and Moses was captivated by fear and terror, what are we, who are not receiving the stones of the Law but in fact, God Himself, His Body and Blood, to say? What kind of an earthquake should we experience within our being, what transformation of the soul and compunction!

These events are in themselves incomprehensible, ineffable, indescribable, nevertheless, God at times provides that our senses are also affected! For example, we can see the priest above the ground or sense a pleasant smell inside the Church Temple or during the Holy Eucharist... however these instances are only perceived by those who have a clean heart and their illuminated nous is not wandering.

When we say that the nature of our Church as well as that of the Divine Liturgy is **mysteriological**, we do not mean that they are characterized by something magical and eerie, but that Divine Grace through the holy Mysteries remolds and spiritually transforms the Christian. It deifies them, grace is shed upon them, it makes them koine ktisis (a new creation of the universe); moreover, Divine Grace liberates the faithful from their own passions as well as weaknesses. That is why the believer must attend the Divine Liturgy in a spirit of contemplation, in fear, devoutness, compunction, having sacred thoughts, and most of all without any wandering of the mind. The Name of the Lord should be kept, as much as possible, inside them.

God reveals the Mystery of salvation through the transfiguration of man. By descending from the heavens God became like us if we exclude sin. Therefore, through the Mysteries (Baptism, Chrism, Repentance (Metanoia) - Confession and Holy Eucharist, in particular), God is inviting each and every one of us to make us the way He is, to create us, as the Apostle Paul says, "conformed to the image of his Son".[1] Hence, the Divine Liturgy gives us the opportunity to have our souls spiritually regenerated and also our bodily senses transfigured. As we depart from the Church Temple we ought to be different, altered, transfigured, calm and peaceful. If, by any chance, we are in a mess, impatient, nervous, then something is not working right and we should be prudent! Watch out your pride!

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[1] Rom. 8,29

The power of Divine Worship lies in its mysteriological nature. And in this way we can overcome all the formalities and symbols, which are of course necessary, however they are not 'the be all and end all' of everything. For we must feel the ousia (essence) that of the Divine Worship whose aim is to elevate and transfigure our human nature. As long as we are transfigured we can obtain peaceful and sacred powers; as a result, we will be able to have a great impact on our children, the people who are most dear to us, our companion, parents, brothers or sisters, and generally the people of God. Finally, our faith must not only be strengthened but also be more powerful when we leave the Church.

During the Divine Liturgy we are neither mere spectators nor is all that takes place strange and beyond us. When we gather inside the Church Temple we are 'Ecclesia' (the Church) celebrating the Divine Liturgy through the clergy, who in turn are called Celebrants of the Most High as well as shepherds. What is true for me and for the Celebrants of the Most High is that it is not I, humble and unworthy as I am, who shepherds. Nor are you, the people of God, my flock (congregation), my own possession. It is God, our Lord Jesus Christ who shepherds through me, the unworthy, wretched sinner as I am, His own flock, in other words all of you. And along with you He guides me, too. God leads me to a spiritual pasture, to the meadows of Paradise, of the heavens and of Scripture; hence, I, on my part, ought to lead you to this same pasture of the Kingdom of God.

Now, we will give you certain information, in brief, as well as specific symbolisms pertaining to the **Holy Vessels**:

♦ **The Holy Cup** as we all know is the Cup in which we receive Holy Communion. Prior to the Consecration it symbolizes the vessel of the Passion in which they had put sour wine mingled with gall, and "filled a sponge [with] vinegar..." for Jesus Christ to drink when He cried "I thirst!" For this reason there is always a sponge inside the holy Cup when it is kept in the Sanctuary or the Diakonikon. According to Tradition, Saint John the Evangelist gathered in this same vessel the Blood and Water that came out from Christ's side the moment when the soldier pierced It with the spear.

After the Consecration of the Holy Gifts, the Holy Cup represents the cup in which the night of the Mystical Supper the Lord offered the all-holy and life-saving Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

♦ **The Holy Diskos** represents heaven that is why it is round. It carries the Master and Lord and Creator of heaven. Many times the icon of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos -from Whose womb the God-Man Jesus Christ was born perfect God and perfect man- is engraved.

♦ **The Asterisk** represents the stars in the sky, particularly the star that

"went before"[1] the Three Wise Men guiding them to Bethlehem and "came and stood over where the young child was...with Mary his mother".[2] The Asterisk is placed in cruciform on the Holy Diskos.

♦ **The Holy Spear**. With the Holy Spear we make exactly the same symbolic movement with that of the soldier who pierced the side of Christ's Holy Body on the Cross, we say: "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water"[3], as we pour wine and water inside the Holy Cup. At this point it is worth mentioning Saint Theodosius of Argos' true story.

9. This Saint in particular celebrated the Divine Liturgy only once. On the first day he became a deacon, on the second day a priest, and on the third day he performed the Liturgy for the first time. When it was time to "pierce" the Holy Bread with the holy Spear, he saw, right before his eyes, himself as a soldier with a sharp spear piercing the Holy Body of the Lord as Blood and Water were coming out of His Side. No one will ever find out how terrified he must have been (this will remain unknown) when he poured wine and water inside the Holy Cup! He was indeed captivated by divine fear so much so that when he had completed the Divine Liturgy he never celebrated it again. [4]

10. Something similar occurred during our century with Father Hieronymos of Eghina the one-handed monk. He was a monk in a privately owned Hermitage to his death, the year 1966. The year before, my presbytera and I paid him a visit and after giving me a load of advice he narrated in private and in a spirit of compunction the reason why he had resigned from his position in the Priesthood. In 1923, when he was still a deacon by the name of Basil, the Metropolitan of Karystia, Panteleimon, in his visit to Eghina and following a great deal of pressure, persuaded him and ordained him priest. In fact, Father Hieronymos was appointed in Eghina's Hospital by the Metropolitan, Panteleimon. However, he was given the name Hieronymos one year later, by the holy Gerontas Hieronymos Simonopetritis (of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petra on Mount Athos), when he was given the Great Angelic Habit, since he had already resigned from his position in the Priesthood.

[1, 2] Mat 2, 9 and 11 [3] Joh. 19,34

[4] Paraskevopoulos, Yerv. Archmindrite, *Interpretive Overview on the Divine Liturgy*, Patras 1958, p.32

So, forty days after his ordination, as he was celebrating the Divine Liturgy, and following the Consecration of the Precious Gifts in other words the time when he was getting ready to receive Holy Communion after the union, spellbound as he was and ecstatic due to prayer and to the way he felt in his heart, all of a sudden he sees the Holy Gifts inside the holy Cup taking the shape of Flesh and Blood, real flesh and blood. He was, by all means, in a state of shock on account of this supernatural phenomenon. As a result, he was praying for hours at the sight of this great mystery, as tears were streaming down his face. He then exited the Beautiful Gate shaking and read the Dismissal Prayer, without saying a word. Afterwards, he was praying with great intensity, asking God to give His consent in order for the Most Holy Body and Blood to come back to normal, become once again bread and wine. And so it was. After this incident he submitted his resignation that same night. Since then he felt his hands incapable of piercing the Lord on the Holy Prothesis or dismember Him after the Consecration. He nevertheless continued to work for the hospital Chapel as a chanter and preacher. He stressed the fact that: "With these mortal and sinful hands I could not touch The Lord of Glory." And after he had kissed me he departed saying epigrammatically: "Be careful father because very few priests are saved." Also, he once told another priest very naturally: "If ever you do not see your Angel beside the Holy Table, then there is no point to celebrate the Divine Liturgy."[1]

Is there anything that might accuse the conscience of all of today's Celebrants of the Most High, whatever the rank, after having read about the aforementioned true stories.

♦ **The Holy Spoon**, Communion-Spoon represents the hand of the Seraphim from the Angelic order which held a burning coal and touched Prophet Isaiah's mouth and said: "this has touched thy lips, and will take away thine iniquities, and will purge off thy sins".[2]

We call it **lavida** -a pair of tongs-due to the fact that in the past a pair of tongs was literally used. It was used to receive the Pearl, in other words a piece of the Body and Blood of the Lord: the Christians would put their right hand on top of the left one and when the priests would place the Body of the Lord inside their palms to receive It; this is how it is also done in the Liturgy of Saint James, the Brother of Christ.

The use of the Holy Spoon prevailed later on for the sake of good order so the pyr (fire) of Divinity would not come in close contact with the hands which in turn get dirty and infected very easily.

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Is. 6,7

♦ The two Veils, **Kalimata**, with which we cover the Holy Diskos as well as the Holy Cup, represent either the firmament of the sky or the swaddling clothes that were used for binding the Holy Infant, or even the winding-sheet for Christ's body and the fine linen cloth that cover a corpse for burial, in this case those of Christ's Tomb.

♦ That which is placed on the deacon's or priest's back during the Great Entrance, is called **Aer** (the cloth that covers the Holy Gifts). It is the symbol of the bright cloud of Mount Tabor. The priest lifts it with both hands and gently waves it over the Holy Gifts when we recite the Symbol of Faith and symbolizes the triumph of Resurrection and of faith.

The "Aer" is also called "veil dividing the sanctuary from the nave". It is well understood that we mean the veil which would divide - in the the Old Testament Temple - the Holy from the Holy of Holies.

♦ The red cloth, with which we wipe our mouth when we receive Holy Communion, is called **Maktro** and is a Communion Cloth or Chlamida (Mantle). It also has its place in the Divine Liturgy since it represents the mantle, in other words the scarlet robe, with which Christ was clothed by the soldiers in the Praetorium, and which was also steeped with His Most Holy Blood, streaming down His Body after having undergone severe whipping.

♦ The **Sponge**. It is a round-shaped sponge. Following the Consumption of the Holy Communion and the wiping of the Holy Cup with the Communion Cloth, the priest places the sponge inside the Cup in order to absorb humidity and avert corrosion. It represents the sponge which the soldier filled with sour wine and offered it to the Lord while he was on the Cross: "And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink".[1]

♦ The **Mousa**. It is also a type of sponge, but thinner and rammed, suitable for gathering the portions from the Antiminsion (Anti - Mensa = instead of a table) as well as for cleaning the Holy Diskos.

Let us now continue with the **Holy Vestments**:

We priests ought to prepare ourselves mentally every time we are about to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. To put it differently, what is secular should be left behind, we also ought to forget all about our self as well as our faintheartedness, fatigue and illnesses once we enter the Church Temple in order to recall that we are His celebrants. Just realize what we are about to do! That is why the priest should not be disturbed by anything from the moment he wakes up until the time he commences with the words "Blessed is our God..."

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[1] Mark. 15,36

When the priest celebrates the Divine Liturgy he ought to seem like an angel. Just like Angels who do not keep their feet on the ground since they are dematerialized and thus do not feel their weight, like wise priests should also stand in fear before the Holy Altar that is in fact God's throne and the Calvary of His Sacrifice. If all of us priests were to celebrate in a spirit of compunction, accompanied with tears and the fear of God the whole world would change! However, we, of whom I am the first, lack these.

The Vestments speak their own language.While the priests clothe themselves in them they simultaneously recite certain verses from the Holy Bible.

♦ The **Sticharion** (a long, shirt-like piece of liturgical vesture, common to bishop, priest, deacon and subdeacon), is a bright, incorruptible vestment of sanctity, divine majesty and radiance, according to the Church Fathers. It states Christ's purity and illumination as well as the purity and brightness of the holy Angels.

The red color symbolizes the Blood of Christ the Savior. On the other hand, if it is white or another color it represents an image of our Lord's Flesh. That is what we put on first. There is a Cross in the back. All the Sacred Vestments have a Cross on them.

♦ Next comes the vestment which is worn second, the **Epitrachelion** (liturgical stole worn around the neck which is common to bishops and priests). Church services cannot be celebrated without it. For it denotes the balance, the weight and responsibility that priests have for all of our souls. The tassels which are on the lower part of the Stole represent our souls that hang on the Spiritual Father's neck. This in fact does not mean that each and every one of you is not responsible for your actions. Nevertheless, I will be judged for the way in which I do my job, for how much I hurt as well as cultivate the example I set and also for the way in which I guide the souls of the faithful. Time goes by, years have gone by and I have not done anything yet...

♦ The **Epimanikion** (wrist-cuff worn as liturgical vesture, common to bishops, priests and deacons) symbolizes God's creative hands.We lend God our hands with which He ministers. In fact, the cords represent the rope with which the Lord was tied.

♦ The **Zone** (liturgical belt worn about the waist over the epitrachelion and sticharion), which we wear around the waist does not exist in order to keep the garments together so as not to fall. It might also be worn for this purpose; however, it signifies the undivided attention that we should all be characterized by, the strength, abstinence, and virtues which we need to cultivate in order to be able to guide the soul of each believer.

♦ The **Epigonation** (diamond-shaped piece of liturgical vesture suspended to hang on the right thigh, common to bishops and certain priests). It is the dignity (a vestment worn by priests who are entitled to it by special grant) that is given by the Church to its priests. It represents the towel

that the Lord used in order to wipe the feet of His Disciples. In the past, the priests would hang a towel in their belts and with it they used to wipe their hands.Later on, it became a sacred vestment.[1]

The Epigonation represents, according to **Saint Symeon of Thessalonica**, "the victory over death, our incorruptible nature and the great power of God over the evil tyrant..."[2]

♦ Finally, the **Phelonion** (cape-like, loose-fitting priestly vestment without arms). It symbolizes the scarlet cloak, the one the soldiers clothed Christ with, in order to mock Him, while He was in Pilate's Praetorium. I think that every priest who follows Christ's path is often mocked, treated unjustly and crucified. It is as if we see Christ on His way to Cavalry. The phelonion as we previously mentioned, does not have arms so that priests do not get involved in secular things according to **Saint Cosmas Aitolos**.

11. Once there was a person whose soul suffered from an unclean spirit, and so a priest read exorcisms. Why do you think this person started shouting and protesting? The answer is that as soon as the priest covered the person's head with the phelonion, the one he had used earlier to perform the liturgy, it filled the air with a sweet-smelling savor as a result, the evil spirit could not tolerate the smell and thus started protesting. This incident is based on the person's avowal that took place the following day.[3]

One additional experience testifies the sacredness of the vestments as well as the power of Priesthood:

12. An Anonymous Hesychast (Hermit) was getting ready to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. He had said the Kairon, that is, the Entrance Prayers prior to the Divine Liturgy in other words, the preparation which starts off in front of the Iconostasis (in a Byzantine Church, the screen separating the nave from the sanctuary) and is followed by our entrance into the Sanctuary the place where we are vested with holy vestments.

As he was heading towards the closet to get his vestments, he sees a large number of Angels coming down from the heavens up high; the Angels were holding a huge vessel, in the shape of a disc, something like a creel - incomprehensible to the human eye. This utensil included vestments which the Angels had brought from the heavens and they used

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[1] Kallinikos K., Protopresbyter, *What is Celebrated in the Christian Church Temple*, Athens 1958[2], p.521

[2] Symeon Arch. Of Thessalonica, *Apanta* (collected works), reprinted from 1872, B. Rigopoulos publications, p.322

[3] Personal notes

them to clothe him in these divinely woven vestments! The garment was divinely woven! Can you imagine the sacred garments the Angels had vested him in? Who can possibly describe or speak about them.[1]

Note one more incidence, one more experience which is equally important:

13. There once was a simple man who lived in a village in Greece and wished to see himself vested in the holy garments, that of the village priest, who he also envied when he would see him glowing while he was performing the Divine Liturgy. So, one morning when the priest was not there, he secretly entered the Church and vested himself in those sacred garments. We do not know what was on his mind as he was wearing the vestments. Actually, what was very astonishing was the fact that when he tried to take them off he realized in a state of fright that they would not come off!

He started shouting and calling for help. Lots of people gathered. Many of them also tried to take the vestments off but in vain! The vestments would by no means come off!

However, when the priest arrived he took them off in an orderly, properly and holy manner, as he was blessing and praying.[2]

What is included in the Church is sacred as well as revered. You should therefore not touch anything that you are not supposed to. What pertains to the Celebrant Priest differs from that which pertains to the simple Christian believers.

I truly wish you become transfigured and grafted on each time you come out of the Church. I the Grace of the Holy Spirit may have already been transfused so that you will be able to lead a new life, the life of Christ. Amen.

Before we proceed to the interpretation of the Divine Liturgy, which commences with the words "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." we shall parenthetically refer to the Holy Altar in which the bloodless Sacrifice mainly takes place and which is also guarded by holy Angels.

14. A priest once narrated the following: One night he went to Church late, because he had forgotten something and he had to get it.

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[1] Anonymous Hesychast, *Neptic Theoria*, Sermon No 18 Thessalonica 1979, p.205-206

[2] Holy Monastery of Nikopolis and Preveza, *Lychnia magazine*, issue 173, Dec. 1997, p.17

He unlocked it and stepped inside. It was dark. He later saw from the Beautiful Gate, which he had forgotten to close (he had not drawn the curtain since there were not any holy doors on the Beautiful Gate), a bright Angel holding a burning sword in his hand. The Angel was standing right beside the Holy Table! The priest got so scared that he fled! He was scared, indeed! As he was reach the nave (church portico, the covering entrance to the church, usually consisting of a roof supported by pillars), it was a big Church Temple, he heard a voice:

- Wait! So, he stood there, frozen, as he was rooted to the spot!

-Don't be afraid, he told the priest in a very sweet tone of voice. I am the Angel - Guardian of this Church Temple. When the Holy Table inside the Church Temple is sanctified and becomes Holy, the Lord, the Almighty, the "King of kings and Lord of lords", places a vigilant Angel - Guardian next to the Holy Table.

The priest stood still in the Narthex and listened terrified as he was, having turned his back on the Sanctuary.

The Angel continued with a sweeter tone of voice:

-Come on, come back and close please, the Beautiful Gate which you forgot to close. (The Angel said "please" to the priest! How many of us say please to our partner, our child, our brother, our neighbor, "please"? How many?)

The priest came back - he was not scared or terrified anymore, instead he felt serene - and could not see the Angel anymore. He proceeded hesitantly, but now with reverence not in fear. With hesitation and awe he touched the curtain of the Beautiful Gate and closed it carefully.

Nevertheless, he started wondering: "Was it a figment of my imagination?! Was I dreaming? Or was I hallucinating?"

In response to that however, he heard myriads of Angels chanting "It is truly meet..." The Temple was dedicated to the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos. He could not stand listening to this angelic chanting so he fainted! He fell down!

When, after a while, he came to he went home and did not speak to anyone. Fifteen years later just before his death he told me about his experience.[1]

Thus, in every Church Temple, next to the Holy Table, there is an Angel whom even though we cannot see he observes us silently.

The Divine Liturgy commences with the priest saying:

"Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

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[1] Personal notes

Spirit..." and ends with the words "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers..."

It is divided into three parts:

- The first part consists of the Service of the **Holy Prothesis**.

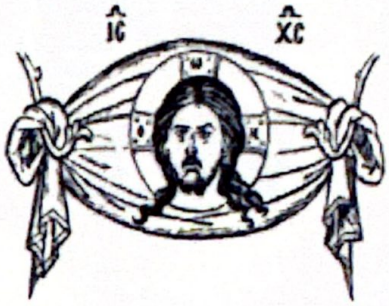
This service takes place inside on the left side of the Sanctuary; it deals with the preparation of the prosphora which are brought to the Church by the faithful. **Saint Symeon of Thessalonica** writes: "The priest goes to the Sanctuary and after he makes three prostrations, he says the word blessed and taking **ONE** of the breads which are being offered, he seals it with the Spear in cruciform, thus representing the saving Passion of Christ".[1]

- The second part is called **Liturgy of the Catechumens**. It commences with the words "Blessed is the Kingdom..." and ends after the Readings (the excerpts from the New Testament which are read during the Divine Service), the Ektenia supplications (a long prayer) and the Prayer for the Catechumens.

- The third part commences with the Prayers for the faithful and the Cherubic Hymn. It ends with the words "Through the prayers..." and is called the **Liturgy of the Faithful**.

The main point in the first part is the preparation of the Holy Gifts. In the second part, it is the Gospel for with the Gospel and Epistle reading with the sermon and catechism, the Christian believer enters into the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. And in the third part of the Divine Liturgy the main point is the Holy Cup.

The central part of the Divine Liturgy in its entirety is the great and unapproachable event of the Conversion of the Holy Gifts into Body and Blood of Christ.



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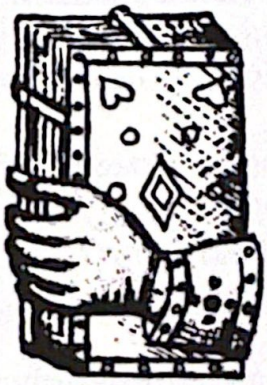
[1] Symeon of Thessalonica, *Apanta*, (collected works), ibid, p.111

PART I

THE LITURGY FOR THE CATECHUMENS



1. "BLESSED IS THE KINGDOM OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT..."

This first exclamation is a miracle! Do not wonder, it is a miracle! It is a confession of faith. It is our true Orthodox faith that is characterized by three elements:

♦ **First:** by the sign of the Cross. When the priest says "Blessed is the kingdom..." he makes the sign of the Cross.

♦ **Second:** by the revelation of the Triune Dogma.

♦ And **third**, by the proclamation that this triune God is expressed with the words "blessed is the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

We will now analyze the three elements of this exclamation.

♦ **The first element:** With the words "Blessed is the Kingdom" we raise the Gospel book and make the Sign of the Cross over the Holy Table and especially on the Antiminsion, which is folded. Without the Antiminsion we cannot perform the Divine Liturgy. It is one of the sacred veils (kalimata) that is dedicated when a Church Temple is consecrated. We usually sew holy Relics together on the Antiminsion, which are similar to those that are placed at the base of the Holy Table when a Church consecration takes place.

When the priest declares "blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...", we all bow our heads, deep, down, low waiting for the blessing of the Trinitarian God Whose Kingdom we bless out loud, to overshadow us like a bright cloud.

15. One priest was saying that he had once seen his Geronta's face on Mount Athos, the moment when the latter was raising the Gospel book in order to say "Blessed is the Kingdom", glowing so much to the point that it was inexpressibly beautiful. His eyes were transparent and bright, it was as if they were two endless all-graceful light blue seas. His forehead and lips were as radiant as a cherubic light...[1]

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[1] Personal notes

As we are bent down, we faithful Christians who are in the Church make the sign of the Cross once, nicely and correctly while we thank God at the same time.

We must also make the sign of the Cross:

- When the triune Name of God is being exclaimed: "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit",
- When there is reference to the name of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos: "calling to remembrance our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate, most Blessed and Glorious Lady Theotokos"
- during other sacred moments.

♦ **The second one:** With the words "blessed is the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" the Dogma of the triune God as well as the work of Divine Providence is being revealed. This work which is covered by the Divine Liturgy in its entirety is also the work of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, whose beginning and kingdom is one. "The Word became flesh through the Good will of the Father and the synergy of the Holy Spirit", the Church Fathers verify.

We hear this particular triadological expression (that which refers to the Holy Trinity) many times during the Divine Liturgy:

- In all exclamations, like:

- During the small Doxology: "Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

-"For thou art a good God and lovest mankind, and unto thee we ascribe glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

- In the context of the Thrice-Holy Hymn: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us".
- In the word "Alleluia" this is said three times.
- During the seraphic hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth".
- And in almost all the endings of various Prayers in the Divine Liturgy, as well as in all Mysteries.

This triune expression presents the One God in three hypostases. Three hypostases that are worshipped. One God, Who is distinguished in three Persons. And each Person, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is all God and not part of the Divinity.

All God the Father,
All God the Son,
All God the Holy Spirit.

God is a Unit, one God, and One, according to His unified and undivided essence. Yet, God is also Triune. The Holy Trinity is a Triune God as far as the Persons - His hypostases are concerned.

The one hypostasis - person is distinguished from the other. Nevertheless, all three Persons of the Divinity are inseparable and undivided and all three have the one and the same essence, nature and energy. They hold the same opinion, make the same decision and proceed to the same action and deed. They have one wish, one will. Thus, they are "One in Three and Three in One".

We should be ready to give our life for these truths. We should be ready to shed even our blood if we are to proclaim the triune God. Since,

- God is the Father,
- God is the Son,
- God is the All - Holy Spirit.
    - The Father is Without Beginning,
    - The Son is Co- Beginningless,
    - The Holy Spirit is Co- Beginningless and Co-Eternal.
        - The Father is All-Powerful,
        - The Son is All-Powerful,
        - The All - Holy Spirit is All-Powerful.

In the Thrice - Holy hymn "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us", the triune God is apparent since "Holy God, the Father without beginning, Holy Mighty, the Son also Without Beginning, Holy Immortal, the All- Holy Spirit or the Comforter. Holy Trinity, glory to Thee."

The Dogma of the Holy Trinity is in fact "the culmination of Faith", according to **Saint Gregory the Theologian**.[1]

Nevertheless, each Person has a distinctive feature called the "hypostatic feature".

- The Father is Unbegotten.
- The Son is Begotten.
- The All-Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

The Son is begotten from the Father, in a way that is not only without beginning and eternally the same but also one that is beyond any understanding. He is **always** Begotten. There was not one single moment where he was not Begotten. However, He was born in time "by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary" in Jesus Christ, the Person, The Lord who is Theanthropos (both God and man) as man without father and as God without mother. Moreover, the All-Holy Spirit **always - evelastingly** is begotten only from the Father.

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[1] Saint Gregory the Theologian, Sermon 20, GCF based on dogma and the condition of bishops issue t.4, p.277

All the works of God, the works of creation, the works of transformation, the works for the salvation of man, are realized by the Three Persons. The Father is the Decision-Maker, the Son is the One Who materializes, and the Holy Spirit perfects all the works"[1], says **Athanasios the Great.**

There is certainly a large number of testimonies in the Holy Bible, that help us not only confront heretical beliefs but also support us by giving us spiritual nourishment. That is why we should study the scriptures every day.

A **symbolic** example of God's Triune feature was given to us by **Saint Spyridon,** in the First Ecumenical Synod as he was standing in front of Arius holding a piece of brick. When he squeezed it tightly all of a sudden there was fire coming out from the top, water coming out from the bottom and there in the palm of his hand remained the soil. The brick's three elements are inseparably united.

In order to comprehend the mystery of the Holy Trinity far better let us pay careful attention to the Apolytikion (first principal hymn of the day; also known as troparion or dismissal hymn) of the Feast of Theophany:

"When Thou wast baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of word. O Christ our God, Who hast appeared and hast enlightened the world, glory be to Thee".

Therefore, during the Holy Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ, the veneration and true spiritual worship of God who is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was noticeably revealed to the world for people to see and hear.

16. In 1910 in a small village situated in Epiros called Palaioseli in Konitsa, as the day was breaking for the Feast of Theophany (at about four o'clock in the morning) a twelve-year-old boy got up and went to the yard. Everything was covered in snow and it was freezing cold.

As soon as the child opened the door and went forward he stood still since he was taken by surprise and wonder. He saw all of nature turned upside-down! In other words, he saw everything upside-down. The mountains, the houses, the trees, even the sky which was clear and starry. The branches were turned downwards and the roots of the trees upwards. The yard walls were also turned upside down. The mountains too...The Aios River was flowing in reverse, from downwards upwards!

Is there anything paradoxical about it? Doesn't our Church testify triumphantly: "The Jordan holds back the stream of its own waters..."?

When the child came round from that sweet surprise, and as he was heading back home he saw that everything was back to normal.

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[1] Athanasios the Great, PG 26,596A

The child, however, went back outdoors... And look, the one and the same altered nature...The same previous incomprehensible picture was turned into calm, strange, faint and diffused shedding of light! It was not coming from the all-white snow that had covered everything all the way; nor from the deep clear starry sky. No, it was something else, something which captured the senses as well as a child's soul inside this boy. It was a calm shedding of light never known before; he was never to experience it again, until the time of his death at the age of eighty-four. Furthermore, the twelve-year-old boy was my father.

I wonder how many souls, immaculate and pure, have been able to see this extremely paradoxical event related to an altered form of nature.

When my father narrated this story to me, two-three times he always used the same words, his voice was quiet, humble and tears were streaming down his eyes, tears that roused compunction and awe!... [1]

If all of us including contemporary priests and faithful Christians who attend church services, were as innocent as that child and our life were characterized by holiness, God would also by all means give us a heavenly gleam, a ray of divine revelation of all those fearful and redeeming things which are performed during the great Mystery of Divine Eucharist, which we are analyzing.

The truth pertaining to the Dogma of the Holy Trinity goes beyond man's mental capacity. (This however, does not mean that we should not mention that in which we believe.) Our finite and limited mind cannot contain the infinity of God. Nevertheless, we honor Him, we venerate Him, and we worship Him. He is our One Triune God and Creator.

The truth about the Dogma of the Holy Trinity surpasses man's mental capacities. (This however doesn't mean that we should not refer to this, which we believe.) Our finite and limited mind cannot contain the infinitude of God. Nevertheless we honor Him, we worship Him. He is our One Trinitarian God, our Creator.

17. The teaching that is based on the Triune Nature of God, on the inaccessibility of God's essence, on His undivided nature, on the hypostatic features of the three Persons, were a well-known Abbott's main concern day-in, day out.

So, one night under the clear, starry sky, the Abbott, tired as he was after having spent many hours of studying, profound thinking and research on matters concerning the Persons of the Holy Trinity, stepped out of the monastery and started walking, enjoying the stillness of the

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[1] Personal notes

night and at the same time saying the Jesus' prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me".

As he was walking, however, he gradually moved away from the monastery and about half an hour later he came across a sheepfold.

"How strange! There is a fold of sheep near the monastery and I don't even know it?" He thought to himself. He also noticed the shepherd of the herd who in turn was doing something strange: he raised his hand toward the sky pointing here and there afterwards he bent down doing something on the ground. He kept doing this for a long time. Then the Abbott approached him and curious as he was, he asked:

-Man of God, what are you doing here in the middle of the night?

-Eh, he says, father I'm counting the stars! And then I write on the ground how many I have counted. Afterwards, I raise my hand again and start counting: one, two, three, and four... I count one- hundred, two- hundred and I write them down again. And in the end I will add them all up!

-May you be blessed, he says, but can we count the stars?! There are millions of millions...Can you actually count the stars?

-But the truths of God that you count and search for, can they also be counted? Can your mind contain them, dear father?

Then, suddenly the shepherd and the sheepfold disappeared right in front of his eyes! With his head bent and a feeling of humility the Abbott returned to the monastery.

-It serves me right- he kept telling himself- it serves me right![1]

The truths of God cannot be counted, nor can they be looked into, or discovered with the mind but they are revealed in a clear and illuminated mind, inside a "purified and humble heart". Moreover, if we wish to interpret a passage in the Holy Scriptures, our interpretation should be based on the writings of the Church Fathers. We will not attempt such a task arbitrarily, as in the case of heretics of all kinds.

Therefore, the worship of the Holy Trinity is sacred; it thus, constitutes an inheritance that is not only holy but is also handed to us by the Church Fathers who in turn form the basis and foundation of the Christian faith!

♦ **The third element** of this exclamation refers to the fact that we praise, bless and glorify with all our strength the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we express our admiration, our spiritual worship and love toward this Trinitarian Divinity's Kingdom. For, we shall live in it unto ages of ages. Without it we cannot exist here on

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[1] Personal notes

earth. Hence, it is not a Kingdom of earthly lords who have material wealth, money, knowledge, secular wisdom, supreme power, but One of God's Kingdom!

We could say that the Kingdom of God embraces the entire world, material and spiritual, as well as the faithful Christians as a whole that are on earth and in heaven, in other words the Church.

• **First**, it is **the Kingdom of God in the material world**, hence in all visible creation that exists up in heaven, down on earth and in the sea, from the stellar universe to the smallest organism.

• **Second: The Kingdom of God in the spiritual world**, that is in the celestial angelical Powers as a whole.

A priest (papoulis= the diminutive form of priest) once fainted because he could not stand listening to the Angels chanting during the Liturgy!

Indeed, heavenly chanting cannot be heard by human ears. However, in case it is heard, it can only be heard up to a point so as not to die. Thus, we just faint!

• And **third, the Kingdom of God also expands to this human world, on earth**. God reigns in humans too. In what kind of people, however? In those who believe that He is the true God, believe in God's Trinitarian nature, in His incarnation in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was perfect man and perfect God. God reigns in those Christians who not only believe in Him, not only confess Him, not only worship Him but who also follow His commandments all the way, cultivate the virtues, and obey His holy will.

God reigns in people's hearts. Why is that? It is because "the kingdom of God is within you".[1] Man many times senses this Kingdom. This is why, I would like to ask you to pray, study the scriptures, obey the commandments, attend Church services, go for confession, and partake of the Immaculate Mysteries…

Who is actually this God? The other religions also have a God. Why is it that our faith differs from all the others? It is due to the fact that our faith believes in the One, True, Triune God Who was revealed through Christ, as God and man, and who came down to earth. In other religions, the true God, the One they believe in, is not revealed. Christ was the One who revealed the true God in the world. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one Three-Sun Divinity was revealed to us. Therefore, we often

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[1] Luk. 17,21

offer this prayer addressing the Triune Divinity in three different ways: Lord, Master, Holy.

- All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us;
- Lord, be gracious unto our sins;
- Master, pardon our iniquities;
- Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities"

Archangel Gabriel referred to the Kingdom of God when he spoke to the Virgin Mary saying: "and of his kingdom there shall be no end".[1] Jesus Christ preached the coming of this Kingdom starting from His work on earth with the words: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand".[2]

The Kingdom of God is also proved to be the supremacy of God over the spirit of deception, over satan who governs, as a ruler "of the darkness of this world [3], on human souls, unfortunately. This is evident:

- when our Lord encountered three temptations on the Fourty-Day Mountain where the devil was completely defeated by Christ the King,
- and in the case of the demon-possessed, when Christ commands the unclean spirits and they obey Him.

Nevertheless, the Kingdom of the Triune God is revealed in its entire splendor during the Divine Liturgy where the communion of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity also becomes the communion of the faithful. So, during the Divine Liturgy it becomes a communion of love between the Militant and Triumphant Church but also between the one Church with God.

When all those who believe see this splendor of the Kingdom of God in a spirit of gratefulness toward the Triune God, they exclaim together with the priest during the Divine Liturgy all these magnificent holy Prayers about the All-Holy Trinity.

Unfortunately, however, people, us Christians, Orthodox Christians, forget all about the Kingdom of God and thus become slaves of the devils, satan's kingdom. How has the earth turned from Kingdom of God into hell? How has it now become a curse even though it used to be a blessing at the beginning? How?! Anyone can understand it: due to our sins. Every time we commit a sin and disobey Holy God's commandment, whatever that may be (even when we are not patient, since He told us to be patient: "ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord";[4] therefore, be patient!) it is then when the Kingdom of God that God established within us becomes hell!

This blessed Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit calls to mind the threefold high office of the Lord: the Archpriestly,

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[1] Luk. 1,33 [2] Mat. 4,17 [3] Ephes. 6,12 [4] Jac. 5,11

Prophetic and Royal office. It is worth tackling a particular verse from the Gospel according to **Luke the Evangelist** (12,37), which introduces us in a touching way to the incomprehensible mysteries of the triune Kingdom of Heaven and especially to the way in which the Lord is offering Himself in His Kingdom.

This particular verse tells us something extremely great and fearsome: Our Christ, our Lord and King, the Master and Ruler of earth, of the heavens and of all things, the Almighty Lord, the Master and Lord, the Omnipotent God and Creator, will become something like our servant in the Person of Our Lord Jesus Christ! He will put on the servant's apron, as servants once used to wear, he will make us sit comfortably in the happiness and bliss of the Kingdom of Heaven and pass in front of us, of each and every one of us to **serve us**!!! What service will he be providing us with?! What heavenly, incomprehensible, triune gifts will he be offering us? The unrevealed mysteries of His Kingdom will be revealed and His all-heavenly Glory will brighten us! And all this unto ages of ages!!! Is it worth risking losing all of this for some trivial satisfaction of our passions?

Man's mind stops at just the thought of it. The nous is dazzled and dazed. As long as we live here down on earth, we will not be able to grasp the depth of this parabolic verse. Hence, the mind is in a state of astonishment, admiration, wonder, it remains ecstatic. The Savior serves those whom He saved with His Personal Sacrifice on the Cross! He who "paid" for our transgressions, is also He who serves us! Even though we crucified Him, nevertheless not only did He forgive us, not only did He pardon this crime, but He also fills us with gifts! He embraces us, He ministers us, and He kisses us!

All these heavenly messages of God are unapproachable for our minds. I wonder what our eyes will be able to see and enjoy. That day will be eminent and great for all those Faithful Christians that stand to gain. A day which is characterized as eminent, unwaning, inaccessible, everlasting!

That is why, you should pray. Pray a lot. Cultivate the virtues, endure, study the Holy Bible, be tolerant, hope, be secretly merciful, be merciful on behalf of the departed. Be abstinent, fast, pray for me too...

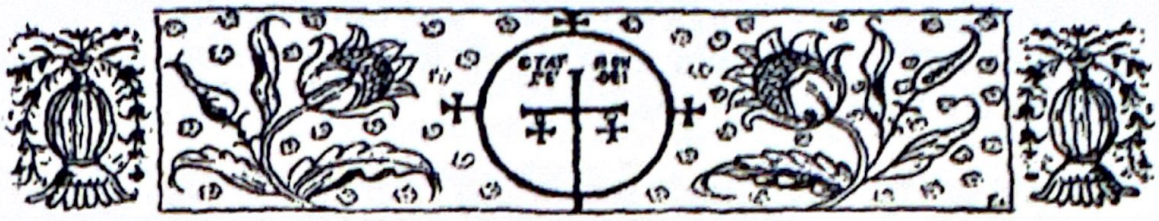
When the exclamation "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father..." ends the people through the chanter respond **"amen"**.

This word in particular is not Greek. However, we encounter it numerous times in the Holy Bible (Old and New Testament), and we hear it throughout the Divine Liturgy.

What does the word "Amen" mean?

- When it appears twice at the beginning of a sentence, it means that which we are about to hear is true. "Amen, amen, I say unto you..." "I tell you - Christ said- that my word is true and certain".
- Whereas, when the word "amen" appears at the end of a sentence, it could express certainty but most often it expresses a wish. In other words, we say "may it happen". We wish wholeheartedly that what was uttered previously, may come true.

In the early Christian years, the word "Amen" was said by all those people who were inside the Church, men, women, children, and it gave the sound of an enormously strong thunder.



2. THE LITANY OF PEACE
"IN PEACE, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD".

18. There was once a monk priest, Father Gideon the Kafsokalyvitis, who used to perform the Divine Liturgy on a daily basis therefore he performed very many forty-day liturgies for the departed.

When he was still a worker on Mount Athos, he had promised to become a monk. Nevertheless, he broke his promise and left, he returned to the world and went to his village. So, one morning as he was heading for Church, he was given an invisible blow, a slap in the face. "You do not belong here!" a voice was heard from above. He abandoned the world and its vanity and took off for the cave of Saint Akakios where he became an ascetic.[1]

The blow that Father Gideon the Kafsokalyvitis was given reminds me of another similar story that was narrated to me.

19. A priest aged approximately 35-40, had neglected his morning and nightly duties, especially those pertaining to the Divine Liturgy. As a result, his soul was gradually declining.

Once, in the Divine Liturgy, during the Consecration of the Holy Gifts, he started yawning. He stopped saying the Prayers and kept yawning. At that point, he felt a strong blow in his face; the sound was so strong that it was heard by the small congregation. At the same time, however, a strict tone of voice told him: "Hey that is enough! Will you stop sleeping?! Take care of your soul that is hemorrhaging and put an end to it!" His cheek was bright red for days; moreover, one could see the finger points!

The word "hemorrhage" would frequently bring to his mind and heart the hemorrhaging woman (later on Saint Veronica) and from that day on he read the equivalent excerpt from the Gospel. He shared the same fear with the hemorrhaging woman, who shaking as she was,

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[1] Moses Aghiorite Monk, *Of Geronda Joakim, Stories from Mount Athos,* Thessalonica 1989, p.152

touched the border of Christ's garment, "and immediately her issue of blood stanched".[1] Since then, that priest was celebrating the Divine Liturgy as if it were his last one.[2]

I could say that each single soul which enters the Church Temple in order to take part in the Divine Liturgy is a soul that is hemorrhaging, but hemorrhaging from sin. Do they enter the Holy Church Temple? There exists mercy, love, affection. The triune Grace as well as our Lord's blessing is given out lavishly in the Divine Liturgy. Inside the Church Temple there is therapy. Through Holy Communion not only do we touch the border of Christ's garment but also we "eat from His Holy Body and drink from His Precious Blood"! And look! The union, the joy, the life, the elevation, the resurrection! So, we long to meet Him, touch Him, and taste Him!

The priest who was given the blow said something similar: "I also enter the Church Temple the same way the hemorrhaging woman entered, I can feel the blow and the hemorrhage of my soul, I experience the same exact thing during the Conversion of the Holy Gifts, this great Miracle: a coming closer, a union as well as an earthquake due to that blow". He was experiencing the same thing!

The woman with an issue of blood and also each distressed person immediately goes to pray, in order to plead, to touch the cloak, the priest's epitrachelion or stole, in order to supplicate... However, in the Temple Christ runs towards us. He is very much humbled; He asks to meet not only with the sinful priest, but with every believer personally.

If the woman who was diseased with an issue of blood held out her hand hesitantly so as to touch the border of the Lord's garment, we priests do something even more daring and more awe inspiring: we hold Him in our hands! We elevate Him up high, we "divide" Him, and we cut him to pieces! I wonder if she as well as His Disciples would have been able to do the same thing if they were in our position. They would hesitate, they would cry, they would melt, they would not dare, they would fall down and say like Apostle Peter did, in a loud voice: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord".[3]

"I was given the blow", said that priest, "nevertheless I cannot come to my senses, I am not shattered, and I cannot fall down, or melt!... O, my God, forgive me..."

We priests, consecrate the bloodless Sacrifice so we must say in a loud voice **"Kyrie Eleyson"** ("Lord have Mercy"). I could say that - I would dare say that I am not pretending to be humble, I am telling you the truth -

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1 Luk. 8,44

2 Personal notes

3 Luk. 5,8

with my hands filthy with sin, I divide His all-holy Body and supplicate mumbling: **"Lord: have mercy"**. I am a Celebrant - Priest, from this same Precious Body and All - Holy Blood all the souls, including mine, are nourished. It is the immortal bread of the soul so that they do not perish. This nourishes them, This strengthens them, This rejuvenates them, This sanctifies them, This dresses them in heavenly garments, This resurrects them. And I, in this unsurpassable and superior to my strengths ministry, once more exclaim **"Lord: have mercy! Lord: have mercy!"** I am a deacon and servant of God. I recite the Prayers... and He..., Lord God and Savior, obeys me and through the Holy Spirit comes down to earth. I, the unworthy one, bring Him down! Shall I not say then, "Lord: have mercy"? I also take Him from the Holy Cup and offer Him to the faithful. Lord: have mercy! Yes! Through His all-holy Body the Celebrant of the Most High unites the Christians and himself with God eternal, with eternity and immortality. Lord, have mercy! Hence, the Triune God borrows my hands, my lips, my eyes, my whole being, (as in the case of every priest and bishop), in order to consecrate the great and inaccessible as far as our minds are concerned, bloodless Sacrifice on the Cross. **"Lord: have mercy!"** I, and every single priest, are honored by Him more so than all the "liturgical spirits", starting from the Angels and Archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim..."**Lord: have mercy!**" The gift of Priesthood is supreme and priceless! But woe to me, I am in need of your prayers."**Lord: have mercy!**"

♦ "IN PEACE, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD"

These words are included in the first petition and exclamation of the Great Litany. After the priest says "Blessed is the Kingdom" the **"Great Litany"** or **"The Litany of Peace"** commences. This includes all the petitions regarding the life of man as a whole as well as the petitions concerning the many facets of peace. It is the Church's initial presence before God and before all earthly needs and situations in man's life.

The first three prayers are dedicated to peace. For peace is the oxygen, it is the clean air, in which the people of God can live, in other words the Church. The primary thing that we need in order to stand before God is peace. We should be peaceful in our inner selves and then amongst ourselves: with our partner, our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters, with the people who are close to us, with our relatives, with each fellow man, for when our heart is peaceful our relationship is peaceful. When we are in the Church we cannot say nor do anything without this peace.

Once the bishop enters the Church Temple in order to perform either Vespers or Matins and the Divine Liturgy, he stands in the centre of the

Church Temple, does not ascend to the throne but after he makes the sign of the Cross, he blesses in cruciform, (front and back, right and left) the people of God saying inaudibly "peace be to all". Only then does he rise to the throne.

If our hearts are not peaceful but are filled with differences, malice, hatred as well as hardness, we cannot bring prosphoron (round loaf of specially prepared liturgical bread) to the Church Temple. We cannot celebrate the Divine Liturgy properly and most importantly receive Holy Communion. Woe to those who are heartless, who are not softened by forgiveness and love.

In the Church's book of martyrs a shocking event is mentioned.

20. During the years of Persecution there were two Christians who had their differences. They had quarreled, disputed and as a result, were not speaking to each other. Their names were Nikiphoros and Saprikios. In fact, the latter was also a priest.

Therefore, the idolaters, following an accusation, arrest Saprikios and put him to jail along with other Christians. As soon as Nikiphoros found out he rushes to jail, falls on his knees outside the prison bars and says:

- Saprikios, forgive me. Forgive me this moment as the martyrdom is approaching!

- No, I won't forgive you! Answers Saprikios.

His co-athletes in the martyrdom interfere by saying:

- Saprikios, forgive him!

- No, he harmed me so much that I cannot forgive him!

The time finally arrives when the Martyrs are gathered and taken, tied up as they were, to the site where the martyrdom would take place. Nikiphoros was following behind.

- Saprikios, forgive me!

- I won't forgive you! Saprikios responded.

Then something terrible occurred: When the first round of heads started falling off the swords of the executioners and it was his turn to confess his faith in Christ for the last time and be beheaded, Saprikios loses his courage and denies his faith in Christ!!! He feels he has been abandoned by Divine Grace!!! For his heart was not captivated by love, apology, and forgiveness. When Nikiphoros sees Saprkios denying his faith in Christ, he rushes and takes the latter's place! He confesses, martyrs, is beheaded and ultimately becomes a Holy Martyr of our Church![1]

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[1] Kantiotis Aug, Metropolitan of Florina, *The Divine Liturgy*... p.44

Hence, the one whose heart was filled with hatred and hardness was rejected by God and thus his sacrifice was not accepted. He lacked divine Grace, in other words, divine power and was not able to die as a martyr. Whereas, the other one, who had love in his heart, was blessed by God and his sacrifice was accepted. Similarly, our own offerings and sacrifices towards God are not accepted if malice, hatred, cruelty, hardness, and lack of forgiveness prevail in our hearts. Thus, during the Divine Liturgy we should not allow our hearts to be disturbed by all kinds of logismos, passionate thoughts related to hostility, vengeance, disturbance, groaning/grumbling, irreverence towards God. Therefore, peace should prevail in our hearts even if we are being treated unjustly and as a result have a lot of trouble and feel embittered. Peace towards all people. Christ's Peace.

Unfortunately, many times, inside the same Church Temple there are Christians who do not talk to each other as soon as they step out, they do not even say good morning; those people could be both parents and children, daughter-in- laws and mother-in- laws, friends and relatives, as well as brothers and sisters! They enter and leave the Church with hatred in their hearts. They live with hatred in their hearts until they die. They do not mean to offer each other forgiveness. Consequently, Christ's Peace has fled their hearts and in its place the devil's hatred reigns. So, you should tell them and also you yourself should be aware of the fact that as many prosphora as they offer, as many candles as they light up and as many Liturgies as they offer, moreover, as much charity work as they do, they do not benefit anything from them.[1]

Our heart's cruelty and hardness is a deadly sin. Sin brings about trouble and confusion. The Christian believer becomes not only Christ's enemy, his own enemy but also his fellow man's enemy if the former is characterized by hardness of character and intransigence.

- God's enemy, for he is separated from Him.
- His own enemy, for he loses his peace.
- His fellow man's enemy, for he is filled with agitation and malice.

"In peace, let us pray to the Lord"

We ask Christ to give us His peace, since with His Sacrifice on the Cross He gave it to the world. We attain this peace through repentance. When we approach Christ Himself in a state of repentance He in turn takes us where His peace reigns. "Go in peace",[2] He tells us and takes us to His Holy Church Temple, His Church, which is the asylum and palace of peace.

Inside the Church Temple with the intercessions of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, of the Angels and the Saints, our soul - since it is by all

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[1] Kantiotis Aug, Metropolitan of Florina, *The Divine Liturgy*... p.46

[2] Luk. 7,50

means peaceful - is sustained by the purity of prayer; it practices "vision of God" (theoria) through the Holy Spirit. More simply: with its inner peace the soul experiences the Blessedness in "the kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

"KYRIE ELEYSON" (LORD, HAVE MERCY).

The response of the people after each petition in the Great Litany is: **"Kyrie, Eleyson"** (Lord, Have Mercy).

The words "Lord: have mercy" is the briefest prayer in the Church. The most condensed the most concise one. It says everything. The prayer **"Kyrie Eleyson"** does miracles.

The book entitled **"Apostolic Injunction"**, which includes all the oral teachings, traditions and resolutions of the Apostles on Church matters, stresses the fact that the prayer **"Lord: have mercy"** has to be uttered by all the little children together.[1] It is well understood that children play a major role in the life of the Church! We are neither Protestants nor Roman Catholics! Are not children members of the Body of Christ, members of the Church? When I was little, during the years 1930-40, mothers used to place in front of the solea (elevated area at the eastern-most end of the nave running the length of the iconostasis) all the boys on the right side and all the girls on the left; all of which were characterized by order and stillness. The rest of the people would follow; of course, the women would sit separately from the men.

Thus, the commandment of the "Apostolic Injunction" as far as the prayer **"Lord, have mercy"** is concerned, which should also be repeated by children, clearly shows the true spirit of the Orthodox Divine Worship of our Church. It is a spirit of childhood simplicity and purity that additionally shows us how much the atmosphere of worship of the Church Temple, as well as that of Divine Worship, is at a loss in the absence of children.

The Divine Liturgy is not just a simple ceremony, a reception or a concert inside a protestant hall, but a **Celebration**, a **Mystery**, a **Sacrifice**, a **Miracle**, in which we should all be partakers, all the members, as the mystical Body of Christ.

All the children who are present during the Divine Liturgy along with the people ought to - according to the Apostolic Injunction - say **"Lord: have mercy"** for "the kingdom of heaven dwells in them".[2]

In the Celebrant Priest's petitions, the people, through the children, respond "Lord, have mercy". We ask for mercy, so that God would show compassion through the children. Why? Because we adults cannot tolerate God's

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divne Liturgy, a treatise for edification*, Kozani 1982, p.26

[2] *Apostolic Injunction*, book VII, LGFC v. 2, p.150

justice, since we are sinful, that is why through innocent children we are begging Christ the Savior for mercy and philanthropy. I do not know which western pseudo wave of devoutness after 1948 (approximately) took all our little children away from the Church. And we are now faced with the consequences.

We come back to the Great Litany during which, not to mention during the entire Divine Liturgy, the priest invites the faithful to pray for their numerous and diverse needs. The faithful however ask only for mercy.

- In peace, let us pray to the Lord (the priest)
- Lord: have mercy (the people)
- For the peace from above . . . , let us pray to the Lord.
- Lord: have mercy.
- For the peace of the whole world . . .
- Lord: have mercy.
- For this holy house . . .
- Lord: have mercy.
- For travelers by sea, by land and by air, the sick, the suffering, the captives, for those who travel by air, for those who are vexed with unclean spirits . . .
- Lord, have mercy.

We make thousands of petitions. The answer is "mercy! mercy! mercy!" for when we ask for God's mercy we ask for His Kingdom, which our Lord Jesus Christ promised to give us. Those who ask for His Kingdom are in no need of anything else."But seek ye first the kingdom of God... and all these things, shall be added to you".[1] All your needs will be met. Therefore, through our actions, and our life, in deed, we should first ask for the Kingdom of God.

God's mercy is the force of the Divine Kingdom. By having divine mercy we have everything we need for our salvation. The Divine Liturgy leads us towards the Kingdom of God. It is the one and the same "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

God listens and responds to the prayer **"Lord: have mercy"** depending on the purity and simplicity of our inner self. Even if you cry out "Lord: have mercy" one thousand times yet you continue to do harm and also remain unrepentant in committing sin, the prayer will never be worth anything.

The prayer **"Lord: have mercy"** does wonders, when we are pure. Besides, we encounter it many times in the Gospel:

- "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David", cried the two blind men, who were "sitting by the road", and whose eyes "immediately received sight..."[2]

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[1] Mat. 6,33

[2] Mat. 20,30

- "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us..." the ten lepers "which stood afar off... lifted up their voices" and "as they went, they were cleansed".[1]
- "Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatic and sore vexed" the unfortunate father was beseeching God for his son, and the Lord worked a miracle.[2]
- In the sea of Tiberias, when "a great tempest arose", the Disciples were scared with the height of the waves and terrified awoke the Lord, saying: "Lord, save us: we perish". And the Lord "arose, and rebuked the winds"[3] and the wildness of the sea, and the miracle occurred!
- What was the woman of Canaan crying out after the Lord? What was she beseeching? "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil..." And after the Lord tested her faith in order to set an example to the future generations until this day, He worked a miracle and said: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."[4]

The prayer **"Lord: have mercy"**, marks the beginning of the theology of the Noetic Prayer of the Heart (The Jesus Prayer).

21. There was once a soul who told me what had occurred during nightly prayer. She was saying the Jesus Prayer with the prayer rope. "Lord, have mercy on me..."My Jesus, mercy..." She was praying for one, two hours, three, and four... many. Bent sunk into the "area" of her heart.

At one point, in the stillness of the night, and in a condition that cannot be defined by the soul, in front of her, in front of the praying, ecstatic soul, appeared the devil himself! The devil fell on his knees and told her:

- Please...(Imagine the devil pleading!!! The devil which is the fear and terror of us Christians as we are cowards and of little faith... imagine the devil kneeling and pleading!) Please, he told her, do not say that Name, please, don't! If you do not say that Name (of Christ, that is) the entire world will be yours!

It told her: "If you don't revere the Name of the Lord, the whole world will be yours. I shall give you all the glory, authority and power you want." And since it concerned a young individual, he added: "Many lovers will be under your feet, only if you stop saying the Name!"[5]

The prayer **"Kyrie, Eleyson"** (Lord, have mercy) during the Divine Liturgy indicates three things:

First: that the sacrament is realized not only by the Celebrant Priest

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[1] Luk. 17,13-14 [2] Mat. 17,15 [3] Mat. 8,25 [4] Mat. 15,22-28
[5] Personal notes

but also by the compulsory presence of the people, particularly of the naive, innocent children.

Second: by uttering those two words "Kyrie, Eleyson", we confess that the more we are in need of goods (heavenly and earthly ones); the more they are given to us by God "free of charge".

And **third:** that, in order for us to be saved, we are in need of divine mercy. Without God's mercy there is no salvation.

The great gap that exists between God and man, who in turn transgresses, is bridged exclusively by divine mercy. Neither our works nor our so-called virtues and fasting, all-night vigils, prayers and prayer ropes as well as our good deeds will save us! They are necessary however they do not save us! There is nothing more that "obliges" the Triune God to save us, for the Son and Word of God to come down from Heaven in order to become man, for Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, to suffer to be crucified, to die, so that He is risen in glory, than His all-holy mercy!

Hence, during the Divine Liturgy the incessant and constant "epiclesis" or invocation that is addressed by the young and old, the briefest petition, the most drastic prayer and the warmest supplication is the prayer **"Lord have mercy"**. These words express our true and proper stance towards God and towards the entire mystery of our salvation.

22. During the year 1979 in the Holy Church Temple of Saint Konstantine which is situated in Piraeus, there was a Divine Liturgy commemorating Saint Nectarios. Only one priest with the deacon of the Church Temple were performing the liturgy. In the end they said the dismissal prayer "Through the prayers..." distributed the "Antidoron" and then all the people left. By the time the priest said the dismissal prayers, folded his garments etc, it took him and the deacon a while. Finally they left the Church Temple. A devout Christian, who was known to them, was waiting outside the door in agony.

- What are you doing here, what are you waiting for?

The priest asked.

- I am waiting for the Bishop, who was celebrating with you so I can receive his blessing. I want it fervently. Where is he? For he was all glowing! He was sparkling!

The priest was rooted to the spot! But fortunately, at that moment he replied in a versatile way:

- Oh, he left from the Sanctuary's side door a long time ago! And the woman was constantly making the sign of the cross as she was leaving and saying: "Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! What a Bishop, indeed!".[1]

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[1] Personal notes

Let us ask for God's mercy regardless of moments and time, for ourselves, the ones who are close to us as well as our children, for our relatives and friends, for all the Orthodox Christians. Since only God's mercy will save us, the others as well as our Country.

"Lord: have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy".

And don't forget to ask God to have mercy for me too.

Parenthetically, we will refer **to the lighting of the vigil candles** in front of the icons those inside the Church Temple as well as those in our house.

The **bishop in the area of Ochrid, Nicholas Velimirovich**, makes reference to seven reasons that explain why we should light up vigil lamps:

- **First:** So that we would be reminded of the fact that our faith is light. Christ said "I am the light of the world".[1] Thus, the light of the vigil lamp reminds us the light with which Christ illuminates our souls.
- **Second:** So that we would be reminded that our life should be bright, like the lives of the Saints, whom the Apostle Paul refers to as "children of light".[2]
- **Third:** So that our obscure actions, our bad remembrances and desires are censured by the light and thus return to the illuminated path of the Gospel in order for the word of the Lord to be realized: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven".[3]
- **Fourth:** So that we would be reminded of the ever-existing power of prayer. Every time the vigil lamp is lit, it reminds us that we should pray.
- **Fifth:** So that it would be a dreadful sight to the evil powers, which attack us with particular cunning especially during prayer and therefore want to take our minds away from the thought of God. Demons love obscurity and tremble in the presence of light, the light of Christ, which illuminates those who love Christ.
- **Sixth:** So that we would be urged to self-sacrifice. Just as, for instance, the oil burns the wick (a strip or thread of fibrous or spongy material feeding a flame with fuel in a candle, lamp, etc.) in the vigil candle similarly, our own will should burn with the flame of love towards Christ and also be subjugated by the will of God.
- **Seventh:** In order to learn that, as the vigil lamp does not light without the help of our hands, thus the inner vigil-lamp of our heart does not light without the help of God's hands. The effort of our virtues is the required fuel, in other words, the wick and the oil, which can only be lit and illuminate, with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

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[1] Jn. 8,12 [2] Ephes 5,8 [3] Mat 5,16

To light the vigil lamp with olive oil is considered to be our own small sacrifice, an indication and sample of our gratitude and love which we owe God for the great Sacrifice He made for us. With this small sacrifice and with our prayer we thank Him for the life, health, salvation as well as everything else that is given to us in His divine and infinite love.

Why do we use only olive oil? So that we would be reminded of the night when Jesus prayed in the garden of olives. The Lord prayed in the garden of Gethsemane where an oil grove was situated.

The following is a true story that is directly connected to the vigil lamp:

23. On the 24thof March 1942, the eve of the Annunciation, we were in the Northern part of Greece, in my hometown called Drama. It was then under Bulgarian occupation. Deprivation, disease and famine had reached dreadful proportions and death was decimating both young and old, especially children, on a daily basis.

Amongst my relatives was a distant aunt who was a widow with five children. Her husband had been killed by the conquerors six months previously during the 29th of September 1941 massacre. As far as food was concerned there remained a very small amount of olive oil and a handful of corn flour.

Hence, that evening she thought that the following day, that of the Annunciation, she had at least very little food for the children: one-hundred grams of flour and very little oil.

Suddenly, her eyes fell on the snuffed out vigil lamp which hanged in front of the icon stand. At that point she was faced with a dilemma: Should the oil be given to the hungry children or remain in the icon stand with the icon of the Annunciation?

Nevertheless, with a sense of determination she made the sign of the Cross and told the All-Holy (Panagia) Mother of God: "My All-Holy (Panagia) Mother! I shall light the vigil lamp because the day which is breaking is of great significance to our faith; however, You take care and feed my children".

She took the very little amount of oil and lit the oil-candle of the All-Holy One. Its joyous light illuminated the shabby home and her heart was filled with serenity. This sense of serenity accompanied them in their nightly prayer, their sleep and throughout that unforgettable night.

The next day, after the Divine Liturgy, my aunt opened the kitchen cupboard in order to get the meager flour and she remained speechless. What does she see? The "oilcan" filled with oil all the way to the top, as well as two bagfuls of flour and spaghetti! ...

The woman made the sign of the Cross many times, praising and thanking God and the Theotokos for this great miracle, but did not say a word to anyone.

For two years the oil never emptied from the bottle nor did the flour, although the six-member family used it on a daily basis in order to exchange it with other types of food and for charity which was done in secrecy. However, the vigil lamp since then remained lit day and night, revealing the blessed woman's strong faith with its everlasting light.[1]

This true story is a strong blow to us all modern Greek Orhthodox Christians whose vigil lamps at home are not only snuffed-out but also the icon stand is non-existent.

The second petition of the Great Litany is:

♦ "FOR THE PEACE FROM ABOVE AND THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD"

This petition is divided into two separate petitions: **the first** one refers to peace, which originates from our celestial Father and God, and **the second** one refers to the salvation of our souls.

And we begin with the first secondary petition:

"For the peace from above..."

There is indeed heavenly peace the fountain of which is the All-Holy God. It is the peace that was chanted by the Angels the night of Christ's Birth, when they uttered the words "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men".[2]

It is the peace the Lord gave His Disciples as He was telling them: "peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you".[3] Christ's peace is a particular spiritual condition of Divine Grace. It overtakes the inner "space" of the heart and is poured out to man's entire psychosomatic world. Then all thoughts are at peace and thus cease to exist!!! All the senses are at peace as well!!! The body (especially the eyes) is also at peace and an everlasting serenity overcomes man as a whole. Deep inside man feels the need to give the others who surround him what he has, like the Apostle Peter gave the lame man.[4] This peace is perceived even by animals which in turn become very friendly toward the man who is blessed.

24. Father Charalambos who has reposed and was also the Abbott of the Holy Monastery of Dionysios in Mount Athos when he was in New Skete in the year 1964, unexpectedly and after I had posed the question:

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Luk. 2,14 [3] Jn. 14,27 [4] Acts 3,6

– "What is the difference between Christ's peace and world peace", he answered:

– "Christ's peace differs from world peace. There is a huge difference compared to the peace that is given by God. Hence, once as I was praying near my cell's window I felt something that no one is able to describe. While I was praying I suddenly hear a roar "sss, sis... ssss". My external senses ceased and inside my heart there "released" a peace to an unutterable degree. I was not able to move. There was an overwhelming sweet, serene, peaceful feeling. One beyond description! I felt I was experiencing Paradise in me. This experience might have lasted for one hour. Afterwards, it subsided. Nevertheless, it remained in me. Of course, a meager thing remained. Since then whatever crossed my path, concerns, troubles, temptations etc. this peace would never disappear. When this great and unutterable feeling of peace went away, I was crying, shouting: What was that, what was that? My God, I kept saying that was the peace you had given your Holy Disciples: "My peace I give unto you"? I could not take it. I was crying, crying. My God, what was that?!!". [1]

The Church's sermon which is based on peace is perceived differently by people who live in sin and corruption and therefore ask an external kind of peace without fear, danger, famine, misfortune, disturbances, revolution, and war protesting with media chants such as: "Make love not war". They wish to live without God, without the Church and its Mysteries, without the Gospel, without God's Laws. They want peace without any rules and prohibitions. They want peace without any ethical barriers. They want the peace of a consumer society as that well as of material and sensual pleasures. They want a kind of peace that does not have the pain of virtue. However, this kind of peace first and foremost is not acceptable to God, furthermore, it is not the one that the faithful Christian asks for during the Divine Liturgy, when the priest says "for the peace from above... let us pray to the Lord".

Those who honestly believe and repent and also present all the guilt and sin before Christ's feet on the Cross, before the spiritual father's stole, depart confession in peace. In peace which "passeth all understanding", a peace that is incomprehensible. It can neither be measured nor described.

The second part of this petition refers to the salvation of our soul; this, in turn is directly connected to the peace from above. For how is it possible for people to be saved if they are not at peace with themselves, their fellowmen and God? Therefore, it reveals:

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[1] Personal notes

- That man is made of body and soul.
- that "in the image" of God refers to the noetic faculty of man, in other words the psyche, which is an intangible, invisible spirit.
- that the psyche is superior to the body.

This petition is purely spiritual, since God the Word was incarnated for our salvation. He was given the name Savior thus showing that His work was to save His creation from the three tyrants, rulers: that of the devil, sin and death.

If a natural or nuclear "biblical" disaster causes ruins, what will remain then? Only two things will remain the soul and the Lord. He who created it will also be the One to judge it. For this reason, we should take certain precautions as far as the soul's arming, security and salvation after death are concerned.

The value of the soul is priceless, for it is in "God's image" and tends to be "in His likeness" as it is undying, immortal and eternal. The Lord Himself assures it: "for what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"[1]

Accordingly, the most important thing that exists on earth is the salvation of our soul. It must be saved! And what shall become of it if it is not saved? Then again, certain logical and Godly bodily needs should not be neglected for the body is also the Temple of the Holy Spirit that needs our essential, saving care in order for it to be preserved as the Temple of the Holy Spirit as well as the tool for the salvation of our soul. What must be avoided is exaggeration, abuse, sensual pleasures and their deification. This is why as soon as the Divine Liturgy begins, the Church, prior to any other petition, exhorts us to ask for peace and the salvation of souls.

In this dual petition, "for the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord", in other words for heavenly, divine peace and for the eternal salvation of our souls, the people along with the children respond: "Lord, have mercy". Without divine mercy, neither is attained. For "without me ye can do nothing".[2]

Let us neither forget nor neglect, or allow our ears to be either shut or silent. Day and night let us raise our voices and say: "Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy..."

In the Great Litany there is also a third petition pertaining to peace:

♦ "FOR THE PEACE OF THE WHOLE WORLD

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[1] Mark 8, 36 -37

[2] Jn. 15,5

FOR THE GOOD ESTATE OF THE HOLY CHURCHES OF GOD, AND THE UNION OF ALLMEN, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD". "LORD, HAVE MERCY".

In the previous petition we referred to the peace of God in us and to the salvation of our souls for these are in our eternal interest. "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls",[1] as Apostle Peter writes. That is to say: achieve the goal for which we believe; that is the salvation of our soul together with the peace of God in us. Here's the first good fruit of the Holy Spirit.

As Christians, by contrast, we are not outside the world. We do not live away from it; we are a piece of it. The Church is also on earth. It is the Church Militant whose members are the faithful Orthodox Christians, you, me, all of us. Thus, the Church Militant on earth, as the Body of Christ, strides with the world and strives to transform it, transfigure it and lead it to the "life of the age to come".

Hence, with this third petition of the Great Litany the Church prays and beseeches:

- for the "peace of the whole world" ,
- for the "good estate of the holy Churches of God", and
- for the unity of all men under the protection of the one and only true faith of the Triune God.

There are not any local limits in the Church. The Gospel must be spread and made known to the ends of the universe. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you".[2] Thus, the Church is interested in the peace of the whole world, for her own peace depends locally on the peace of the whole world.

The good estate of the local Churches, namely their firm, peaceful condition depends on how peaceful the world is. The church never benefits from social and political riots, revolutions, wars and particularly civil, mutual slaughter. In different parts of the world (e.g. Serbia, the Holy Land), where a portion of their citizens are Orthodox Christians, there are bloody conflicts. Therefore, when the members of these local Churches shed so much blood due to these fatal conflicts, is not the Body of the Church in great trouble? Certainly! It is not only in trouble but also hemorrhaging.

It must be stressed that the Church in the course of history, for two thousand years now, numerous times "paid" the price for somebody else's sins, as people with their passions got her in trouble on purpose with their

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[1] 1 Pet. 1,9 [2] Mat. 28,19-20

differences as well as conflicts. For instance, the Crusades, the wars between Orthodox or Christian countries and other nations, the civil, mutual slaughter of Christians which included raids of monasteries with the burning of the Church Temples, humiliations as well as the massacre of priests, desecrations, tomb raiding and martyrdoms.

Furthermore, the various political parties in the world are trying to win their followers and voters by trading and exploiting the Christian faith.

Prayers for the peaceful co-existence of all people have existed since the creation of the first Church, since the time of the Apostles. According to our Lord Jesus Christ's Evangelical teaching, prayer is done so that all people and all nations are peacefully united and become through Christ's peace, one flock with the One Lord as Shepherd.

For twenty centuries now there is **Tradition and Succession**. Generations of the faithful Orthodox Christians have not only been using the same words in the Divine Liturgy but have also been celebrating it the same way. All the ancient liturgical texts give us the same diagram, the same order, the same style and the same prayers in the Divine Liturgy. This is apparent in the book of the ancient Church entitled **APOSTOLIC INJUNCTION**, where there is a passage of the Divine Liturgy which was celebrated at that time and in which the following prayer is found:

"for the peace and good estate of the world
and the holy churches let us pray".[1]

Therefore, this prayer of the first Church refers to the peace not only of the whole universe but also of the local Churches, which then had terrible trouble due to persecution and martyrdom. And further down in the same text there is a special prayer as regards the inner peace of the body of the Church for always - now and then - she has been and still is extremely hurt and troubled by the multiple heresies, schisms and divisions of her members: **"For the holy catholic and apostolic Church, from one end to another let us pray, for the Lord to preserve and safeguard her steadfastly until the end of the world as It is built on the rock".**[2]

A few years later, **Saint Basil the Great** in one of his Prayers during the Divine Liturgy prays and beseeches: "make the schisms of the Churches to cease... speedily destroy, by the power of thy Holy Spirit, uprisings of heresies." These Wishes, as prayers towards the Triune God are in effect to this day.

Nevertheless, this much-valued peace as far as the Church and the world are concerned, is first and foremost the "peace from above for our souls", not the peace of material wealth and enjoyment. It is **a condition** of true and unfeigned humility **within** us which makes us bear one another without any grumbling. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit "for any good order

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[1, 2] *Apostolic Injunction*, book VII, LGFCA vol.2, p.148

and peaceful condition". This means that neither our life, nor our home and family should lack good order and tidiness.

- Do you have peace? Why don't you say "good morning"? Why are you closed in yourself? Are you afraid that you might lose your spirituality!? You won't lose it! Nobody can take it from you but the devil and your passions!

The fruits of peace are tolerance, forbearance, togetherness, fraternity, and love not only in the Church but following the Divine Liturgy as well.

People around the world will not be able to be at peace externally if they do not attain God's peace in them first. Let us not expect to have peace in our homes if we are not at peace first with ourselves, then with our partner, our parents and our brothers and sisters. That is to say, peaceful with the kind of peace that is God-given. This means that we should primarily correct ourselves with the help of Christ's saving Orthodox teaching and the all-holy Mysteries and later on, the other members in the house will also improve with the life we lead and the example we set. Afterwards, our fellowman, our neighbor, the foreign, the unorthodox, the heretic, even the enemy will correct themselves.

People begin the opposite way. First they want to change the world and then themselves. We can all see that as far as our private life, the slogans of associations, societies and clubs and also groups of people are concerned. Furthermore, it is apparent in the proclamations of great politicians who govern us. We should start off with God, faith, the Mysteries, the Gospel and also with putting the holy commandments into practice. In this way, we correct ourselves. First and foremost, we ought to transform our bad self into good, virtuous, reliable, blameless, and pious.

We should put firmly into our minds the petition's words "peace from above", which should become our "property" within our soul, a piece of our self. This piece of our self should pour outwardly, just as when we exhale. Thus, it can be seen by others indeed if we have attained peace and we are real children of our Holy God; the God of peace!

The fourth petition of the Great Litany refers to the Orthodox Church Temple and to those Christians who enter it in order to partake of the Sacred Worship:

♦ "FOR THIS HOLY HOUSE AND THOSE WHO WITH FAITH, REVERENCE AND FEAR OF GOD ENTER THEREIN, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD".

We have stated that the Divine Liturgy cannot be celebrated when the sacred Antiminsion is not on the Holy Table. It is a sacred cloth that is folded,

and on top of which the priest with the Gospel book makes the sign of the Cross, as he says the words "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". The four Evangelists are depicted in each of its four corners. (The Lord's Gospel is the pillar and foundation of truth.) In the centre of the Antiminsion the Passion is depicted (on the left the Unnailing, on the right the Resurrection, at the bottom the All-Holy Tomb of the Lord and at the top the Cavalry with the three Crosses). Moreover, we have the presence of the Angels - "the multitude of Angels were awed as they saw You..." - the post where the Lord was tied, the whip of cords, the rooster that crowed three times, the sponge, the reed, the spear and all the other things that were used during the Lord's Martyrdom. (There are various kinds of Antiminsion.)

On the Antiminsion another piece of red, silk material called **"eiliton"** is attached. On this cloth we are unable to see the all-holy **Tomb** that is impressed. Many times we also sew holy Relics in the upper-hand corner of the Antiminsion.

The Divine Liturgy is celebrated on the Antiminsion and at times it is used instead of the Holy Altar Table. It has the fragrance of holy myrrh, for with it we wipe the myrrh during the consecration of the Holy Altar Table. Hence, it is "established" and sanctified and then it is signed, bearing the seal of the bishop who performed the consecration.

Most of the time, devout priests as well as deacons have mentioned that during the Divine Liturgy and following the Cherubic Hymn, when the Antiminsion is unfolded, an unspeakable sweet-smelling savor comes out of the holy Relics unexpectedly!

25. For instance, I am referring to the priest Father Demetrius Gagastathis who confessed that: "During the Cherubic Hymn an aroma was coming out of the Holy Table... It was coming out in the form of a small beam of smoke and gave off a sweet fragrance inside the whole Church Temple. It was a devout Liturgy that cannot be uttered in words. This is our Religion crying out to us that it is alive!

Even now every time there is a Divine Liturgy the Holy Altar Table of the Commanders of the heavenly Powers, the Archangels, gives off an aroma following the Great Entrance, the time when I place the Sacred Mysteries on top of it".[1]

In the center of the Holy Altar, in the central pillar, which symbolizes the Lord, we also place holy Relics of Martyrs, for the Church was made firm due to the fact that it was based on the Blood and Sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and the blood of the Martyrs whose journey is bloodstained.

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[1] *Father Dimitrios Ghaghastathis, His life - miracles, admonition and epistles,* Orthodox Kypseli, publ, Thessalonica 1975, p.187

That is why our salvation is realized through numerous sorrows, efforts, hard work, struggles and lamenting. Our path is not made of cotton or velvet. We go through a lot of grief; we hurt a great deal only because the sensual pleasure of sin in our life was great.

26. A particular hieromonk, who calls himself "desperate", in his book "NEPTIC THEORIA", states, apparently about someone else when in fact it is himself he is referring to, that during the time when he was saying the Jesus' prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me", he went into a spiritual trance... and saw an infinite number of demons - like the sea sand, they were so many- who were attacking him furiously.

They were in a murderous mood. They were everywhere, extremely aggressive, rushing against him in order to tear him to pieces...

As soon as he came round he ran, scared as he was, towards the Church.

- Where will I take refuge? He wondered. Where else would I turn into but the fearful Cavalry, the Holy Altar, where on a daily basis I perform the Most Immaculate Mysteries in tears and distress? I will throw myself before the feet of Christ and His sweetest All-Immaculate Mother, the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos.

Bearing that in mind, he rushed to the Church Temple. As he entered he saw the Lord and the Theotokos in the iconostasis, as if they were alive, with royal glory. The Lord's Divine Countenance was filled with an unspeakable beauty and was glowing more than the sun. All the Church was drenched in His divine radiance. Everything was brilliantly arrayed. The vigil lamps, the manualia (big candle holders), the few pews, the chanters' lecterns, the small chandelier that was hanging above, the small bishop's throne, the Holy Altar, the Holy Table, the priest's vestments, the icons of Cherubs, the Holy Prothesis (the Table of Offerings), everything was resplendent, filled with light and glory! Most of all the iconographies, all around the walls of the Church Temple: the Church Triumphant were present, in splendor and all-glorious.

That ascetic priest could not look at the Countenance of the three-sun Glory of the Lord any more! He just worshipped... he also touched or thought he touched the hand of the Lord which was put out in order for him to kiss.

In awe he approached the icon of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, kissed Her virgin hand in the icon and dared look at Her Countenance. In Her arms he saw the Divine Infant as if He were sitting on a Cherubic Throne... this divine complex was matched so well, just like the beauty and fragrance of an all-white lily or a bouquet of sweet-scented roses... Beauty, fragrance! ...

The Theotokos was looking at the priest with infinite sweetness and such meekness that he took courage and said:

-My All-Holy (Panagia) One! My sweet All-Holy (Panagia) and Mother of my Jesus, how will I escape from the demons which are chasing me?

With the name of my Son and with my name you will defeat and annihilate the demons, answered the Theotokos.

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me",

"Most Holy Mother of God, save us",

"Most Holy Mother of God, help me".

Here, inside the Church Temple, as well as in your cell and outdoors, while you are working or resting, everywhere and constantly, you should invoke the Name of my Son and my name, continued the Theotokos.

The hieromonk made a full prostration, stepped outdoors and cried with all his might:

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!"

O Theotokos and Virgin, rejoice, O Mary, full of Grace!"

Immediately, all the impotent, weak, cowardly demons vanished before him lightning quick.[1]

"For this Holy house and those who with faith..." "Lord, have mercy".

In fact, **what is the Church Temple more specifically all about**, which is usually called "Ecclesia" (Church)? We know that the Church is the mystical body of Christ, and we faithful Christians are its members. As far as their conscience is concerned, Orthodox people perceive the Church in the way the Holy Church Temple is built and shaped. The holy and sanctified place in which the people of God gather and celebrate the Divine Liturgy is called -and is- the Church, as **Apostle Paul** mentions: "how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God".[2]

For exactly the same reason we see in many icons where the Preeminent Apostles Peter and Paul are depicted, the two Apostles holding in their hands, between them, a Temple. It is the Church of Christ, which was built locally. And although the Fathers stress that we cannot give an exact defi-

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[1] Of an Anonymous Hermit, *Neptic Theoria*, Sermon 1, ibid p.30-31

[2] I Tim. 3,15

nition for the word Ecclesia, nevertheless, we can only say that it is "the Mystical Body of Christ", this is why it is portrayed before our eyes and is expressed with the shape of the Sacred Church. This portrayal is not only successful but it is also sacred. For the Divine Liturgy that is celebrated by the Church, sanctifies and transfigures the faithful Christians and the material space in which it is performed.

The Church Temple is called **Sacred** and **Holy** because:

- **First:** Our One and Only God-Man Lord and Savior exists and rests in the Holy Gospel. Jesus Christ and the Gospel book on the Holy Table are indistinguishable. It is one and the same, for our Lord Jesus Christ is never perceived as separate from His divine teaching, which He came and revealed to the world.
- **Second:** The Church temple is sacred and holy due to the fact that it comprises the Sanctuary, the Holy Altar and the Holy Antiminsion on which the bloodless Sacrifice is offered.

On the Holy Table there is the holy Ark where -with God's good will- the Body and Blood of the Lord has been kept and preserved since Good and Holy Thursday. It is united and dry and thus can be preserved in order to be offered in emergency cases.

- **Third:** the Church Temple is called holy because here the Celebrant priest of the Most High serves and circulates; the priest should be holy or at least make an effort, as he strives with all his might and with permanent zeal, to realize the master's commandment "they shall be holy to their God... for they offer the sacrifices of the Lord as the gifts of their God, and they shall be holy".[1]

Saint Maximos the Confessor says that the Church and the Temple are related to each other like man's psyche (soul) to its body. Can the soul be seen? No, it cannot be seen. Nevertheless, the body is visible, we see it and say: "there's the man". Exactly the same thing happens when we see a Church Temple immediately we say: "there's the Church".

Hence, the Church which is a divine and spiritual reality, the mystical Body of Christ, is in contact with the material world and expresses itself through the Holy Church Temple and through whatever is performed in it.[2]

The first Church Temple of the New Testament as a place of worship was the upper of Zion. In that loft the first "Liturgy" took place by the Great Archpriest, our Lord Jesus Christ, during the Mystical Supper.

After Pentecost, the Holy Apostle Peter's sermon, and the foundation of the Church as well as the first Christian gatherings took place in homes,

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[1] Lev. 21,6

[2] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, Kozani 1982, p.35

for the "breaking of the bread", the worship of God with spiritual hymns and odes, and in order to listen to the word of the Gospel from the mouths of the Apostles. These were the "house churches". However, following the stoning of Saint Stephen the Archdeacon and First Martyr, when the persecutions against the Church started, the Christians took refuge in caves, fields, boats, inns, basements as well as in the upper rooms of homes and later on in the Catacombs.

The Catacombs were Roman cemeteries located underground. They consisted of very intricate underground tunnels and in the adjacent walls they buried the dead and the Martyrs, of course, inside the breastplates. That is why on the tombstones with which they sealed the tombs' mouths the name of the Martyr and the date of their martyrdom were inscribed along with the words "fell asleep in Christ" or "was a martyr for Christ".

Were the Christians safe inside the Catacombs, where they took refuge when they were persecuted, in order to worship their God secretly? Not always. The idolaters used spies to have the Christians under surveillance and when they discovered them, they would enter and kill them. Inside the Catacombs especially, they used to light fires in order to burn the Christians or they would block the exits as well as the air holes so that the Christians would die from suffocation. The following texts refer to these martyrdoms.

27. During the great persecution of Numerian who was the son of Marcus Aurelius, a large number of Christians had taken refuge in the Catacombs of Saints Chrysanthos and Darios. Nevertheless, they were noticed by the idolaters' spies and along with the soldiers they blocked the visible and secret tunnels of the Catacombs as well as all the holes of the ventilation and as a result, the Christians surrendered their holy souls as they died from suffocation thus becoming martyrs.

As years went by and the time had come to open the Catacomb they found everyone holding Holy Cups, next to the tombs of the other departed Holy Martyrs. It seems that a Holy Cup where Holy Communion was placed, was given to each and every one of them and after having partaken of it they passed away holding the Cup tightly...[1]

28. Saint Stephen, Bishop of Rome, during the persecution of Valerian, had a martyr's death along with other Christians:

He was performing the Divine Liturgy inside a Catacomb. As soon as the Roman soldiers discovered the hideout, they charged in with their swords... There they saw Saint Stephen performing the Divine Liturgy.

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[1] Kallinikos K., protopresbyter, *The Christian Temple...*, ibid p.30

A powerful force held them still and silent until the end of the Divine Liturgy.

When the Divine Worship was completed, they were let go, rushed to grab Saint Stephen, threw him on the floor and beheaded him together with other Christians.[1]

29. Saint Sixtus was Saint Stephen's successor. He also despised the orders of the same emperor who was irreverent towards Christ. Saint Sixtus would descend to the Catacombs of Proksetatus and perform the Immaculate Mysteries.

He was betrayed, discovered, arrested and condemned to martyrdom before the Altar, where he had been arrested. So it happened.

Along with Saint Sixtus they had also captured his Archdeacon the Great Martyr and blessed Lawrence whom the gentiles tormented on a red-hot grill as if he were a piece of fish or meat...

His speech addressed to the executioners, who admired and in turn confessed their faith in Christ, has been saved. He told them: "I am done on this side turn me on the other side too"![2]

The Catacombs in Rome including Saint Priscilla's and Agnes' are the most well-known, the latter since the first century. In the Catacombs of Saint Agnes there are numerous Greek inscriptions and liturgical texts which prove that the main liturgical language, even in bloodstained Rome, was Greek.

Inside the Catacombs we can see all kinds of symbolisms, hierarchical thrones, primitive Baptismal Fonts, a large number of vigil lamps and other utensils... all of which were steeped with the crimson blood of the holy Martyrs.

The archeologist Padre Marchi, who was named the "Columbus of the Catacombs", estimates that the tombs of the Martyrs are six (6) to seven (7) million.

During that period the Christians put their life in danger every time they went to the Catacombs; nevertheless we contemporary Christians, even though we are not in danger, do not go to Church or are too bored to go or if we go, we go with a cold heart. In order for our hearts to be once again rekindled with the sacred flame that burnt the hearts of the first Christians we need to have true repentance, contrition and tears. We need to alter our way of life, abandon our secular ways and become more consistent with our

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[1, 2] Kallinikus K., protopresbyter, The Christian Temple..., ibid p.31

obligations towards the Triune God and our neighbor. We ought to confess our faith. Our life should speak for itself. The example we set to others ought to be instructional.

The splendor that characterized the Divine Liturgies at the time inside the bloodstained Catacombs, the same grandeur, the same splendor, the same triumphant faith, the same mystagogy is experienced in the Divine Liturgies of today. Divine Worship, Divine Eucharist, is ONE, since one and the same for us all was the Sacrifice of God-Man our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The Orthodox Church Temple is divided in three parts:

- the **Narthex** or Church Vestibule, which is the first part that those who enter the Church is encounter. Where the church table for candles, the big candle holders, the Holy iconostasis, etc., are many times located.
- the **Nave**, which starts from the Church Vestibule and continues on to the iconostasis or 'Templo', is the screen separating the nave from the sanctuary.
- and the **Holy Bema**, which is located behind the Iconostasis in the east.

The Church Vestibule which is also called "pronaos", the section prior to entering the Church Temple, was the place of the Catechumens. In the past, however, this place was dedicated to those who were in repentance, in other words to all those Christians who were not only under a strict penance which consisted of abstinence from Holy Communion but were also forbidden entrance into the Nave and participation in the Divine Liturgy. They usually remained in the Church Vestibule along with the Catechumens. The Catechumens left with some of those who were in repentance.

There were quite a few **categories** of those who were in **repentance**:

- The **proskleontes**. Were those who wept for their transgressions and who besought the Christians who would enter the Church Temple to pray for their salvation.
- The **aphorismenoi**, those who were excommunicated (temporarily).
- The **heimazomenoi**, those who were hard hit most of the time, remained outside the Church and tolerated rain and snow; (that is why they used to call them "hard hit").
- The **akroomenoi**. Those who were listening to the liturgy.
- The **ypopiptontes**. Those who had committed a transgression.
- The **synistamenoi** and
- The **energoumenoi** those were under the effects of unclean spirits, the possessed. This is where they should stand, not in the Nave.

So, all those who committed mortal transgressions remained in the **Narthex**. During the first centuries the Church was austere. Today if we were to differentiate into such categories as "proskleonton" and "repentants", all of us - along with the priest - would go to the Narthex! This is where we belong!

The Church would not allow anyone who was impious as well as an unrepentant transgressor to enter the Church Temple. Its true guards - the bishops, and priests- would have preferred to lose their position and even their life, instead of allowing those who had committed mortal sins and who were also impious, even if they were noblemen and kings, to enter during the Divine Liturgy. This is proclaimed by the following incidents taken from Church History.

30. Vavylas was a bishop during the year 283A.D. in Antioch. When the regional king committed a mortal transgression and wanted to go to Church Easter day, Saint Vavylas prevented him from entering. He told him that if he truly repents and executes his canon of repentance, only then could he enter. Namely, he should confess his sin in public -listen to this!- declare his repentance and accept his penance! Therefore, he would either stand in the Narthex, as all those who were under penance -even if he were a king-, or leave. Nevertheless, he was not to enter the Church that day!

After the king chanted the Resurrection hymn "Christ is Risen" outside the Church, he took his entourage and left.[1]

31. A similar incidence is taken from the life of Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. He did not allow the Emperor of Byzantium, Theodosius the Great to enter the Church Temple, for he had ordered the death of thousands of people in the racetrack of Thessalonica.

He asked him to declare his repentance in public, receive his penance and then enter the Temple of God! This is exactly what the emperor did on bended knees in the middle of the Church Temple.[2]

32. The third incidence is taken from the life of the Patriarch of Constantinople Polyefktos. This Patriarch in particular did not allow

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, P G. 50,529

[2] Kallinikos K., protopresbyter, *The Christian Temple*... ibid p.104

the emperor Nikephoros Fokas to enter the Church Temple of the Holy Wisdom, for he had illegally contracted marriage with Theophanous.

As soon as he was proclaimed emperor Nikephoros Fokas wanted to enter the Temple of the Holy Wisdom of God. The Patriarch Polyefktos went to the entrance of the Church Temple and "blocked" it. Primarily, he asked for real repentance and confession in the Church Temple, in front of everybody, acceptance of his penance, and only then would he be allowed to enter the Church Temple.[1]

In the Narthex, on the west wall, the iconographers would paint the fearful icons of hell, so that those who remained unrepentant would sense the horrible and eternal torment of hell and repent for their transgressions. However, on the east wall of the Narthex iconographies depict the beauty and heavenliness of Paradise, the door of which remains constantly open, for all those who repent and confess. Such wall-paintings are seen today in certain Narthexes of monasteries on Mount Athos as well as here in the world in several old monasteries of the 10th - 17th century.

After the Narthex we will be referring to the Nave and the Holy Bema. These two portray heaven and earth. The Nave represents earth and the Holy Bema the heavens.

All of us inside the Nave are the Church Militant on earth. In the iconography of the Church as a whole with the Saints, Martyrs, the Monastic Saints, the Hierarchs, the Righteous, the Prophets, the Angels, the Church Triumphant is also present. Militant and Triumphant, the ONE Church of Christ, together, inside the Church Temple!

In the **Nave** there are the amvon (area of the solea immediately before the holy doors), the bishop's throne, the pews, the big candle holders, the vigil lamps, the icons...

The **Amvon**, where the Gospel is read and where the sermon is addressed to the faithful is located in the north side of the Church Temple. In the past it was located in the middle of the Church Temple, today however, it has been transferred.

The **Episcopal throne** is found in the southern side of the Church Temple; it occupies a prominent position and bears the icon of Christ the Bishop. A characteristic element is that it does not bear a vigil lamp. This suggests the merciless Judgment of God.

The **pews** existed and exist as rule on the left and right side of the walls in the Nave. Today's pews are of Protestant origin something which is proven from the Orthodox Church Temples of the Eastern Slavic peoples.

Between the Nave and the Holy Altar the **Holy Iconostasis** stands on either side with the icons of Christ, the Holy Theotokos, the Honorable

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[1] Religious and Ethical Encyclopedia, vol. 9 p.482

Forerunner, the Saint of the Church Temple, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. It did not exist during the first Christian years. It appeared in the middle of the 7th century. It bears three pillars: the one in the centre is called "Beautiful Gate" and the other two small one "side doors". The Beautiful Gate is higher for the stairs of the solea are in the front. There appears the Serving Priest in order to bless, preach, and commune the faithful. The solea represents the burning river which separates the righteous from the unrepentant transgressors.[1]

The Fathers say that the priest is between heaven and earth, in the series of Saints on the Iconostasis, this is why it is located a little bit higher. He is the mediator, intercessor between heaven and earth, between the faithful who attend Church services and our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, certain people at times see the priest -even if he is unworthy- on air, that is to say that his feet are not stepping on the ground.

There are two kinds of **icons**: the ones that are portable and the frescos. The icons of Christ, the Holy Theotokos, the Saints and the Angels are found in all Orthodox Churches. Only in Roman Catholic Church Temples there aren't any icons. The Roman Catholics have statues instead of icons. The Protestants on the other hand, have neither statues nor icons. They only have the Cross.

However, the majority who hate and despise icons are pseudo Jehovah witnesses. They accuse us and the Church that we are supposedly becoming idolaters and breaking the second commandment of the Decalogue, which entirely forbids idols: "Thou shalt not make to thyself an idol"[2] doe to the icons we have.

The enemies of icons say that they are idols and as a result they belong to the prohibition of the second command of the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic Law. Nevertheless, they are mistaken. They confuse icons with idols. Idols are one thing, icons are another. An idol means to take a piece of marble, sculpt it, give it some kind of form, erect it, and then say that this is god, fall on your knees and worship it.

If a piece of marble or wood could hear more so could idols hear people's prayers? It was the devil's terrible fallacy. The devil hid uderneath idols. Idolatry was and is demon worship.

We, however, do not say that the icon is God. First of all, there isn't a single icon that represents God, for God is invisible; He is the ultimate Spirit and cannot be painted. That is why the Holy Trinity cannot be portrayed in iconography.[3] And even if the Holy Trinity is portrayed in iconography, it is done in a traditional way, where God the Father is depicted as "the Ancient of days".[4] For the first Person, God the Father has not made

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[1] Kallinikos K., protopresbyter, *The Christian Temple*... p.112: "The solea in the form of the burning river, which separates the transgressors from the righteous".

[2] Exod. 20,4 [3] Gen. 18,1-2 [4] Dan. 7,9

His presence visible. Only His divine voice is heard during Christ's Baptism and His Holy Transfiguration. In addition, when the Holy Spirit is depicted in iconography it is portrayed as a dove in Christ's Baptism and as blazing flames in Pentecost.

However, when God, who is invisible as well as the second Person of the Holy Trinity to be precise, bore flesh and was incarnated, he became like us, exempted from sin, walked here on earth, suffered, was crucified, was resurrected, then God who is invisible through the second Person, became visible on earth. Christ as God cannot be depicted in an icon nevertheless, as man He is depicted in iconography! Only those who deny that Christ became man, perfect man, without ceasing to be perfect God, with human flesh and bones, exempted from sin, could reject the fact that Christ can be depicted in icons.

Christ along with all His visible powers on earth is depicted in iconography; from His Birth up to His Ascension. Nevertheless, when Christ is depicked in iconografy we never say that His icon is Christ Himself! No! We say that the icon portrays Christ. Therefore, do you see idolatry anywhere?

The heretics, who reject the use of icons, might argue that we venerate them. No! We neither venerate nor worship icons; we just honor them. We, Orthodox Christians, just venerate and worship the one Triune God. We do not venerate icons as if they were gods. May it never happen! The honor and veneration of icons is "based on the prototype",[1] according to **Saint John of Damascus**.

Hence, this is how all heretics are: liars and crooks. They twist the truth and accuse Orthodoxy, which teaches and confesses that which is in accordance to the true interpretation of the Holy Bible. If however, there are Christians who honor icons more than what is specified in the Dogma of the Orthodox Church, this does not mean that the Church approves of these deviations and mistreatment.

The holy icons are neither idols nor paintings. Their great value is found in their theological content and in their consecrated and miraculous impact that is exerted on the faithful Christian. Like each page in the Gospel includes written words, similarly each icon with its forms, shapes and particular postures expresses the truths of the Christian faith. Thus, in a most effective way the Byzantine Orthodox mural and portable icon was called "the theology of the illiterate" or even better "the Holy Bible of the illiterate". For each icon is a live sermon, a confession of our faith. At the same time each icon is a divine calling to the imitation of sanctity.

Therefore, icons inspire us, make our faith stronger, raise our hopes, they give us the courage to continue our spiritual struggle. We look at them and in turn, they create in us the certainty and confidence that prior to us many others struggled and won, those who we now honor, for they con-

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[1] Saint John of Damascus, *Exact Publication*... p.392

quered the world of passions, the flesh with its vulgar desires, but also the devil. They conquered the fear of death and especially cowardice when they were faced with the confession of their faith and martyrdom. And their victory is and constitutes the pride and boast of the Church.

So, by looking at holy icons our senses are even sanctified, however, with ordinary religious paintings, which are seen in books, or with the "madonnas" of the Roman Catholics, it is not the same. These icons neither inspire us nor purify us and even more do not censure us. For through these paintings the artist expresses his own feelings and by using the material and the models that are available to him, he expresses himself. These forms of self- expression of the West are not part of the Worship of the Orthodox Church.

The Byzantine iconography on the contrary is a service or **deaconate** and demands that the iconographer be holy, sanctified, purified, abstinent, and in prayer. The iconographer should start and finish his work by making the sign of the Cross, censing the icon, praying to the Saint that he will be creating in order for him to receive his help. Byzantine iconographies are a sign that God and the incarnated Son and Word are present on earth. It is a sign that the Church Triumphant is present among the faithful and also a remarkable criterion for the Orthodox Christian understanding of life and the world.

This great spiritual significance of holy icons as a result made them objects of special honor and devoutness on behalf of the faithful. Christians bow before them and this is the way it has to be. They light vigil lamps and candles and then venerate them by making the sign of the Cross and even prostrations. They cense them on a daily basis at home and in the Churches, the Holy iconstands that are found on the street, the hills and mountaintops.

Since there was much mistreatment and extremity like, for example, in the case of icon worshippers on the one hand and iconoclasts on the other, for this reason, the 7th Ecumenical Synod which convened the year 784 to 787 A.D., defined the meaning of these honorable expressions towards holy icons. Worship belongs exclusively to the All-Holy God. We venerate icons only to honor them. And this honorary veneration is not addressed towards their material elements (wood, colors, glass, paper, cloth) of which icons are made, but towards the person that is depicted on them. When we attribute honorary veneration to icons with our strong belief that it goes to the prototype, this is what makes the miracle.

Holy icons are the books of our people. The person who is illiterate looks at and is taught by them.

33. The story says that the beginning of repentance and return of the Bulgarian people to Christianity is attributed to an icon that depicted the Future Judgment. The missionary Saint Methodios showed explained and analyzed it to King Boris. The king was so impressed

that immediately he together with all the Bulgarian people believed in Christ.[1]

This is why the two Saints, Cyril and Methodios, are the great illuminators and missionaries of the Slavs.

34. Once a preacher was on a tour and as he was passing outside a cottage, outside a stable, he says: "Why don't I make a stop at this Christian's house? I will always find something to tell him."

Therefore, he entered and started talking to the villager about the Lord. He noted that there were not any icons inside the house. So, he spoke to him about icons.

- What are those? The villager asked.

The preacher took one out of his pocket and gave it to him. He told the him to light up the vigil lamp and pray... He taught him many things.

The villager was excited. As soon as he was given the opportunity he went to town in order to get an icon of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos. He liked the way in which She was holding Jesus the Infant. He also saw Saint Demetrios, as a rider with a spear. "I will take him in order to fight the enemy", he thought. "Let me also buy this long - bearded Saint..." It was Saint Nicholas.

He put them in his small house and started praying to the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, Saint Demetrios, and Saint Nicholas.

Not many days had gone by and during the time when he was away, thieves barged into his house and stole everything. They did not leave a thing only those three icons.

He enters the house in astonishment, sees that they had stolen everything. So, he goes to the icon of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos:

- Okay, you had to take care of the baby, you had to clean and feed it, and you did not have enough time. What were you supposed to do first? Take care of the baby or the thieves...

He approaches the icon of Saint Demetrios:

- And you, a rider, by the time you took the horse out of the stable in order to saddle it and prepare it, the thieves had already gone.

- What about you, (he addresses Saint Nicholas), what were you doing? You didn't do anything! Why weren't you taking care of the things? Well, I will place you outside the house as a form of punishment!

He takes the icon of Saint Nicholas and hangs it outside.

- This is where you will stay until all of my things are returned!

The following morning the thieves arrive, loaded with the things they had stolen.

-Take them quickly, for an old man beat us to death...

Saint Nicholas had miraculously returned the things![2]

[1] Religious and Ethical Encyclopedia, vol. 3, p.995

[2] Personal notes

Looking up high at the centre of the roof of the Nave, there is the **Dome** which depicts the divine countenance of the All-sovereign Christ Who is the Sun of Righteousness and Who looks down on earth, illuminating and transmitting to all creation, the spiritual light of liturgical gathering.

The **Holy Altar** is the image of the heavens, it is the "Holy of Holies", in which the **Holy Altar Table** is located; it is the type of the supercelestial Altar where the Great Hierarch, the Lord who is God-Man, Jesus Christ ceaselessly celebrates priestly functions. The Holy Altar Table is the Fearful Sanctuary, the noetic Golgotha, the Tomb of the Lord, the Throne of God, the tabernacle of Divine glory. It is always guarded by a burning Angel of heaven.

The Holy Altar Table which is supported on a pole portrays Jesus Christ. There are also certain rare Holy Altar Tables which are supported on four poles thus, portraying the four Evangelists. It is completely covered with **veils or cloth - covers**.

- The first one is called **"katasarkio"**, the first of the linen cloths laid on the Holy Table. It is a white cloth like shroud and it covers the whole Holy Altar Table. It is placed on top of it and is tightly tied underneath. It symbolizes the clean sheet with which the prominent council member Joseph wrapped the dead Body of the Lord during the Unnailing, that is, when he took Him down from the Cross.
- The second one is the **endytis**. They are the various bright, luxurious cloths in gold, scarlet red, purple, black, and white depending on the type of celebration and season. They usually decorate the Holy Table.
- The third one is called **eileton**. It is a silk cloth which used to be wrapped in the past, therefore it was called eileton, now however it is attached on the Antiminsion. In the past the Tomb of Jesus Christ was impressed on it.
- The fourth one, to which we have already made reference, is the **Holy Antiminsion**: it replaces the Holy Table and the Divine Liturgy cannot be celebrated without it. On the Antiminsion with the folded and attached eileton the Holy Gospel is placed instead of Christ the Savior.

During the years of Persecution, the chests of martyrs were used instead of the Holy Table.

35. The Holy Martyr Lukianos was going to die as a martyr for his faith in Christ. He was already imprisoned. Not only was there not any Church Temple in prison but also the martyr could not move; firstly because he was tied with heavy chains but also because the previous day he was tortured severely in order to succumb and proclaim that he venerates the idols and thus deny his faith in Christ.

Hence, as he was severely wounded, lying on the floor enchained, and since he was a priest, and even though he was suffering from ter-

ribly stron pain, he performed the Fearful Sacrilice of the Divine Liturgy on top of his chest by himself using bread and wine as Holy Gifts, which were secretly brought there to prison.

However, he was not alone in prison. There were other Christians who were also Martyr candidates and were about to die for Christ. All of them formed a circle around Saint Lukianos in the shape of a Church Temple, Angels and Saints were covering the Martyr so that the idolater guards and the executioners would not see "what was being celebrated" during the Divine Liturgy. Hence, they protected the great Mystery from the desecrated eyes of the idolaters.[1]

Imagine their reverence! If we had eyes to see! If we were able to sense it!

The following story is similar to this one:

36. Saint Theodoritos informs us about the Holy Hermit Mari as follows: After eighteen whole years' life in seclusion and tough asceticism he wanted to attend Church and to receive the Immaculate Mysteries (he had not attended Church for a period of eighteen whole years! He had not received Holy Communion during all these years voluntarily!) he mentioned his wish to Saint Theodoritos who had visited him. For when he opened the door of his cell in order to receive visitors, first he received Saint Theodoritos along with two other deacons who were his underlings.

So, he told him: "I would like for the Divine Liturgy to be celebrated and communicate the Immaculate Mysteries. Tomorrow God is inviting me!"

Saint Theodoritos immediately and willingly celebrated the world saving Divine Liturgy using instead of the Holy Table the hands of the two deacons, which were being held out! The hands and palms of the two deacons were the fearful Cavalry and the noetic Altar...[2]

"Glory to Thy forbearance, Lord..."

These of course, are the exceptions to the rule and take place quite seldom; however they are essential when the occasion calls for it. Hence, the Holy Table and the Antiminsion used to be the Martyrs' chests and the palms of deacons.

Every Holy Church Temple looks towards the east so we can look towards Paradise. The sun rises in the east. The Lord God is the Sun of Righteousness, the three-sun Divinity. For this reason, the whole Church Temple through the Holy Altar looks towards the east in order to welcome the ris-

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[1,2] Kallinikos K. protopresbyter, *The Christian Temple...* p. 190

ing Sun of Righteousness, Christ the Messiah Who through the Holy Spirit fulfills the great Miracle inside the Holy Church Temple, the miracle of the Divine Conversion.

◆ Inside the Church Temple we light **candles**.

During the years of Persecution the Christians would take refuge in the Catacombs, therefore, they would use burning torches in order to be able to see where they were heading. The Catacombs were dark, underground cemetaries. Accordingly, the torches were, in a way, their guides for the sacred gatherings and the Sunday Supper. Therefore, for us today the lit candles like other spiritual torches must illuminate, in the darkness of the present century, the way towards the light of Christ. Candles tell us that we ought to be givers of light, to be able to transmit light and not be light extinguishers, that we should not put out even the little bit of light the other one has. Let us mystically pray so that our wickedness and passions would melt like the candle. And just as the little candle melts, so let us mystically pray that our evils and passions will likewise melt. Then a candle sometimes goes out and at other times again the sacristan grabs it as soon as we light it. Let us not forget that one day we will alsofade away…

As we light the candle we can pray for health and enlightenment: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on my child" or "have mercy on my father, my mother, my brother… who is ill". Furthermore, we could beseech the Lord for the departed: "My Christ, rest my father's soul" or "rest my mother's soul", and the number of candles we light corresponds to our requests and our prayers.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian writes that, on the one hand candles reveal the noetic light to us and, on the other the vigil lamps teach us that we ought to have luminous thoughts. "The candles that you light reveal to you the noetic light. As the whole Church lightens up from the great amount of candles of this kind, so should the dwelling of your soul which is more honorable than the Church, be luminous in a noetic way… The large number of candles which are lit signify the luminous thoughts that should glow within you, like the vigil-lamps so that no dark thought should remain in the dwelling of your soul, nevertheless let all of them be lit and shine with the light of the Holy Spirit".[1]

Inside the Church Temple there are also the **candelabras** on which the candles are placed. They symbolize the burning pillar which as a beam of heavenly light would lead the people of Israel in the desert during the night. The **chandelier** in the past would consist of many vigil lamps.

◆ Outside the Holy Church Temple there is the bell tower with the **bells**. Every Holy Church Temple has its own bells, its own belfry. We very seldom see a Church Temple without a bell. People show their interest in

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[1] Saint Symeon the New Theologian, P.G 120,677A

some distant, far away deserted chapels, on mountain tops. They consider a Church without a bell a sin. That is why they place even a little bell to ring at times even merely with the blowing wind.

And the question is:

Have our Churches always had bells?

No, History answers. There were not any bells during the time when Christians were persecuted by idolaters. When Christians were about to gather somewhere in order to worship the All-Holy God they were notified differently. They were informed secretly. In other words, there were loyal people whose mission was to notify Christians as they were extremely cautious with idolaters; they did their best so that they would not be noticed. For if they found out where they gathered, they would ambush, catch them, imprison them, kill them or set a fire and burn them, as they were gathered inside the caves, apertures, and Catacombs. It was a tremendous era indeed!

Those who would take on this difficult and very dangerous task which was to notify Christians used to run on the streets, in villages and cities in order to execute the divine order. They were the so-called **"runners in God's race"**, in other words the postmen of God. They were also called **"people gatherers"** for they would assemble; gather people in order to worship God.

From the 2nd and 3rd century A.D. many Christians would run away from the cities and villages and go to the desert, set up tents and away from the world, they used to lead an austere life, a life devoted to God. Those were the first monks.

They had moved away from each other. They were notified to gather and have a common worship with a few pieces of wood which they used to beat in a unique way, the way it is done today in monasteries where the monks at night are invited to attend the holy services with the so-called **"talantons"**.

In the monastery built by Saint Pachomios, the monks were summoned to the synaxis (a gathering of the faithful for worship) of Divine Worship with the sound of a trumpet. The Saint justified this kind of announcement by saying that the old Jewish synagogue was summoned to the assembly with the sound of trumpets.[1]

However, when Constantine the Great came along with the end of the persecutions the Christians were notified with formality. The way in which they were first notified was with the use of an **iron "simandron"** (a wooden or metallic object with length 3m. width 10cm. and thickness 5cm), which was sounded with a hammer.[1] Even today these are heard on Mount Athos and at many other monasteries as well. Following the "talandon" the "simandron" is heard and following the "simandron" the bells are sounded.

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[1] Num. 10,2-3

The Orthodox East did not have any bells. Nevertheless, they pre-existed in the West. They appeared for the first time in Constantinople in 865 A.D. long after the Church of the Holy Wisdom was built. Then a nobleman from Venice sent the emperor of Constantinople twelve bells as a gift for the Church Temple of the Holy Wisdom. (They were called "kambanes", bells, for they were made of fine metal, originating from the mines of Kambania, a province in Italy.)

Also, when the bells sounded for the first time in Constantinople, according to historians of the time, its devout people poured out on the streets feeling great joy and started having a feast. It seemed to them that the Angels had come down to earth playing the trumpet and summoning the faithful Christians to Church. The bells of the Church of the Holy Wisdom had been ringing for a period of approximately 600 years. However, when Constantinople fell in 1453 A.D. the bells ceased ringing. The conqueror had taken them down; melted them in order to make them cannons and bullets... The use of bells had been prohibited in all the places that had been conquered by the Turks for the sound of the bell disturbed the sleep of the dead!

During those horrific years the enslaved Christians were once again informed in a secretive manner. The runners in God's race had once again appeared and were now called **"town criers"**. These people during those dreadful nights in the years of Turkish occupation ran in order to notify the Christians, the generation of Greeks who were under bondage. Thus they put their lives at risk so that they could attend Church services and learn how to read and write as well.

Hence, when our Country was liberated the bells were returned to the Church Temples' bell towers. They started once again ringing triumphantly.

37. There once lived a Church Temple-caretaker who was devout, very pious and had the fear of God. He was one of those caretakers whom we consider servants of the Church Temple.

The Church Temple was built in honor of the Honorable Forerunner. The Church Temple- caretaker therefore rang the bells of the Church Temple - there were three, four bells - ringing them with his two hands.

He fell, however, and injured his left hand. Therefore he was not able to bang the bells except with his one hand. For this reason he was very sad. A big feast was coming up, consequently, he would not be able to bang the bells in a sweet, rhythmic way, as usual, sometimes one, sometimes the other, then again both of them together, sometimes three and one, the way they do it on Mount Athos.

So, what was he to do? He approaches the Honorable Forerunner and tells him:

- Listen to me, Saint! This is your Church Temple, you have seen my

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[1] Kantiotis Aug., Metrop. of Florina, *The Orthodox Temple*, Athens 1992, p.71

hand, and I cannot do it with only one hand. Come here. (He takes him by the hand -the Honorable Forerunner came down from the icon!- and leads him to the bell tower). Will you show me now how to ring the bells!

The Honorable Forerunner, ties the ropes into loops, he puts the one loop on one foot, the other loop on the other foot and the other two, the one in one hand and the other in the elbow, and thus showed him the fervent way in which he would ring the bells!

-Thank you very much, the Church- caretaker told the Saint!

And he would bang the bells exactly the same way as was shown to him by the Honorable Forerunner![1]

Inside the Holy Altar, among other things, there are the **censer** and the **vigil lamp** which is always lit, which - in a way - guards vigilantly, together with the vigilant Guardian-Angel of the Holy Table, the Artophorion (container in which the pre-sanctified gifts are Preserved). It is a symbol of sacrifice. It reminds us of the bloodstained struggles of the Holy Martyrs, but also the bloodless martyrdom of the Holy Desert Fathers. The vigil lamp which is constantly lit should be kept in our household's iconostasis so that it will be reminding us that the spiritual struggle geared to our salvation ought to be vigilant, sleepless, all- luminous.

The **incense** is an offering and sacrifice to the Triune God. Accordingly, each time we the Priests take the censer in our hands in order to cense we bless the incense. And you, whenever you cense your houses after you have put the incense on the charcoal, you should first make the sign of the cross with the three fingers and then start censing.

We priests say the following **Prayer** as we bless the incense: **"Incense we offer unto thee, O Christ our God, as a savour of spiritual sweetness, which do thou receive upon thy most heavenly altar, and send down upon us in return the grace of thine all-holy Spirit"**. As the scent and fragrance of the incense is headed upwards, similarly our God, Jesus Christ, receives our prayer in His celestial Altar and in return sends down upon us the Grace of His Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul writes something relevant: Our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for us "an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor".[2] The Sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ was to God - the Father a sweet- smelling sacrifice for us, pleasing, gladly received, a sacrifice for all people.

It is a fact that in all humanity there are quite a few people who accept the message of salvation, who believe, are baptized, and strive to be saved. There are also, however, many others -who are in fact the majority- that

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Eph. 5,2

reject the Triune Dogma, the God-Manly Nature of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God and generally the Gospel and thus, on their own proceed to perdition. Only faithful Orthodox Christians, who struggle to be saved in a good manner, are **"Christ's sweet-smelling savor"**.

Each time we pray in a pure way in the Church Temple our house or anywhere else, each good deed (the first good deed is forbearance, forgiveness and love towards our enemies), every time we obey the commandments, every time we repent and sigh and every time we partake of the All-Holy Mysteries in a pure and immaculate manner, it is a **sweet-smelling savor** and a **sacrifice** gladly-received and pleasing before the Throne of Glory of the Triune God.

While we are referring to the incense let us mention

what the censer also symbolizes.

The base of the censer indicates Jesus Christ's human nature inside the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos' womb. The burning charcoal signifies the fire of Divinity. It is "the bush [that] burns with fire but [is] not consumed".[1] The sweet-smelling smoke that is sent into the air indicates the sweet-smelling savor of the Holy Spirit which proceeds.

Each censer has twelve little bells which represent the twelve Apostles and four chains which represent the four Evangelists. In this way, the work of the incarnated Dispensation is spread everywhere and declared with the Grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of the sweet-smelling scent of the incense. In fact, this is a far later symbolism; however, it annunciates God's philanthropic work which is spread through its fragrance from one end of the world to the other, "everywhere in the world".

38. A certain priest, prior to 1940, as his grandson was narrating, went one morning, when there was a celebration, to Church, in order to celebrate the Liturgy. All the vigil lamps were unlit for air was coming in through a broken glass. It had blown out everything even the vigil lamp which was always lit.

The priest was sad since he was devout. He was searching for matches, he didn't have any. He looks at the bench, he looks in the drawers, he searches here and there without being able to find anything. There were tears in his eyes for he had to go back home again. Nontheless, it was winter, it was raining, while strong, icy, north winds were blowing, bad weather prevailed...

All of a sudden, he turns, looks behind... the censer was burning! Pieces of charcoal were burning red!

(In the old days they had charcoal. I also had the chance to see it.

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[1] Ex. 3,2

We had a small brazier, the Church-caretaker burnt the charcoal very early in the morning, it used to burn red and then we would take it with our tongs, we would put it in the censer and on top of it we would drop the incense.)

Since he saw the censer burning and as he was looking with astonishment, he put a piece of paper, lit it, with it he lit a candle, and with the candle he lit, first the vigil lamp which was always lit and then all the other candles.

He frequently turned to look the censer. He would say:

- Oh, oh, oh, God does wonders! When He wants, He performs miracles!... What a miracle!

Later came the chanter, the Matins commenced, the censer was still burning red! During the ninth ode, the "Most Honorable", he takes it in order to swing the censer and sees sweet-smelling pillars of smoke coming out through the censer as if he had dropped incense in it!

- But, I, he says, didn't put any incense! Lord, have mercy! Anyway, he said, and turning towards the Holy Table, he added:

- You are God, you do as you wish!

After a while his grandson arrived.

- Don't touch, he tells him, the censer at all. Leave it as it is, for God acts as he wishes, my little boy, he acts as he wishes!...

- Fine, granddad, said the little child.

So, the times when he had to cense starting from the Sanctuary until the end of the Divine Liturgy the censer was burning red with burning charcoal and always ready to cense; a sweet-smelling incense would come out, before his grandchild's eyes! As soon as the Church-caretaker took it in his hands it would give off a sweet-smelling smoke of a thousand fragrances which would spread throughout the entire Church Temple. The whole Church Temple was filled with a sweet-smelling savor!

It also impressed the Christian worshippers and when the Divine Liturgy ended, they were telling him:

- My priest, where did you find this nice incense?

He told his grandchild the following:

- Do not tell anyone, except when I die. He is God, He acts as he pleases. He is God, he acts as he pleases!

That's what Father John from the area of Tsesme used to say.[1]

Inside the Holy Altar and on the Holy Table we will see **a variety of lights**. Single candles, double, triple, or single, double, triple, seven - lit vigil-lamps. The single-lit vigil lamps or the single lit candles remind us of the

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[1] Personal notes

unity of Divinity, the dual lights the dual Nature of Christ, the triple lights the Holy Trinity. The seven lit vigil lamp furthermore represents the seven lit vigil lamp on the Tabernacle of Witness, which Moses made, but also the seven special gifts of the Holy Spirit, as the **Prophet Isaiah** mentions:

- "The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
- the spirit of counsel and strength,
- the spirit of knowledge and godliness,
- the spirit of the fear of God"[1]

The Orthodox Church Temple is **a true Theophany**.

- Inside the Church Temple there is the Ecclesia,
- inside the Church there is the Divine Liturgy,
- during the Divine Liturgy there are the Angels, the Archangels the Authorities, the Cherubim, the Seraphim, the Thrones, the Dominions, the Powers, the Saints, the Hierarchs, the Martyrs, the Great Martyrs, the Apostles, the Prophets, the Righteous... In the Divine Liturgy God, the Triune God! The whole Church, Triumphant and Militant, the entire Church!

For this reason, following the Consumption of the holy Cup the priests, chant, on behalf of all Christians who attend Church services: **"Standing in the temple of thy glory, we think that we are in heaven".** Accordingly, those who are inside this Church Temple of Thy divine Glory, Lord, we feel and believe that we are before Thy all-heavenly Throne. And prior to the dismissal worts "Through the prayers", following the Thanksgiving of Divine Communion, we say thrice: **"Make firm the foundation of this house, O Lord"**.

Inside each Orthodox Church Temple, in spirit and in truth we worship and venerate the Triune God and the Word Incarnate which revealed to us this worship of the Triune God. Therefore, each Church Temple, each Ecclesia is indeed a true Theophany!

In his book entitled **"POIMIN"** (SHEPHERD), Ermas, the Apostolic Father, narrates an apparition that he himself saw.

39. Six young lads, who are also aided by many others, are all together building an enormous castle on the waters of a big and strange lake. The castle is made only of stone; however, it is so perfect that one cannot distinguish the joints, the dividers or even the joints of one stone with the other.

At that point, the imposing figure of a reverend Lady makes an appearance and tells the Apostolic Father Hermas:

- The castle, which you see being built, is me, the Church. It is built on water, for our life, our soul, has been saved and will always be saved with the waters of Holy Baptism, since the saving Grace that penetra-

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[1] Is. 11,2-3

tes through Holy Baptism stems from the Sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ on the Cross. Those who are baptized partake in the three-day Burial and Resurrection of the Lord.

The six young men are holy Angels. The stones are the Apostles and their successors are you, the Apostolic Fathers and your successors, that is to say, the Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons of all the millenniums until the end of time, who lived and shall live modestly and righteously, who served the evangelical word with their strong faith and served the people of God in love and fear. Some are alive to this day, others are reposed and more, more, more shall be coming... until Christ's Second Coming.

All of them and everything were in harmony; they were in agreement and at peace with each other...

And the majestic reverend lady, the Church, asked:

"Until when?" "Until when, will there be in harmony and agreement with each other?

And She disappeared.

The divine apparition of Saint Hermas vanished and the Apostolic Father came back to his senses.[1]

The act of building continues with many, many obstacles however. The first clouds appeared rapidly. These were the heresies which caused a bloodstained rainfall and tore the Body of the Church to pieces. The Schism followed in 1054. Then the Crusades, the Venetian domination, and the great and incurable wound of the Unia followed to this day. The four hundred and so Protestant heresies (there are now female priests in England) the millenarians, as a satanic organization, masonry, ecumenism, spiritualism, witchcraft, satanic worship, and the dangers caused by Hindu and Buddhist beliefs etc. All of these together have caused and are still causing profuse hemorrhaging in the Body of the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, most of the time we, as responsible representatives and shepherds of the Church, are not at peace and have not reconciled with each other... However, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it".[2] The Church shall live until the end of time... and beyond it.

The fourth petition then mentions:

"And those who with faith, reverence, and fear of God enter therein, let us pray to the Lord"

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[1] Poimin of Ermas, *horasis c*, LGFCA vol. 3, p.43

[2] Mat. 16,18

During the Divine Liturgy, many times there are Liturgical Prayers, Peace Supplications and Entreaties that urge us about how our posture, our psychological mood and even our movements should be when we partake in the Divine Liturgy!

All of us, who are going to come to the Holy Church Temple, should be appropriately prepared. We should be entering (all of us, us priests too) **"with faith, reverence and fear of God"**, as the fourth petition of the Great Litany has presupposed. We should all be adorned with the same exact virtues when we are invited to the common Cup of eternal Life: **"with fear of God and faith and love, draw near"**. Even after "Through the prayers", every time the Divine Liturgy ends, we should be peaceful, serene, with a quiet voice and behave in an orderly manner.

Saint John Chrysostom stresses the following: "When we step out of the Church Temple, after the end of the Divine Liturgy, we should seem like we have come down from heaven, that we are now heavenly people!"[1] However, we are not!!! We have no faith, we have no respect, we have no reverence, we have nothing!

By attending Church Services and partaking of Holy Communion, when we **"enter therein with faith, reverence and fear of God"**, then each piece of our body, each member, is a part of the Church of Christ!

"The Eucharistic Table of Holy Communion during the Divine Office, says **Saint Nicholas Cabasilas**, puts for us to dwell in Christ and for Christ to dwell in us, for He Himself said: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him". He is for us both a dweller and a dwelling... and we are fortunate for our dwelling and very fortunate that we have become the dwelling for such a Divine Master."[2]

We enter the Church sad and we come out happy. If we enter infuriated, we come out serene. If we are carrying a heavy load, we come out lightweight. If we enter as wolves, we come out as sheep. And there are times when the big miracle takes place, that is to enter as black as crows and tar, and come out as white as the whitest doves.

♦ "FOR OUR ARCHBISHOP... (name), THE HONORABLE PRESBYTERY, THE DIACONATE IN CHRIST,

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[1] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*, Comments, Domos publications, p.139

[2] ibid p. 141

ALL THE CLERGY AND THE PEOPLE, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD"

40. Once, as a bishop was touring his province, he arrived in a village on a Saturday night. It was his first time in that place. He was put up by the president of the village and after a while the bishop asked to see the priest.

- He is in the fields, they told him, and has not come yet.

After several hours the priest appeared before him, dressed of course in his work clothes so you can imagine how he looked like. The bishop was not the least pleased; he wanted to see the priest dressed more decently.

The following day was Sunday. The priest got ready for the Divine Liturgy. The bishop, who would attend the Divine Liturgy, would observe him from the episcopal throne and then from within the Holy Altar. He would certainly find many mistakes in that country priest!

Surprisingly enough when the priest said "Blessed is the Kingdom..." he was covered with a heavenly light, which would warm and illuminate all of his being, without burning him... and this carried on until the dismissal words "Through the prayers"!

After the priest had distributed the Antidoron to the village's Christian church-goers, he went inside the Holy Altar.

The bishop approached the priest, fell on his knees and asked for forgiveness for he had accused him and then asked for the priest's blessing.

The simple priest was taken by surprise.

- How is that possible, he says, for the superior to be blessed by his inferior? You bless me, holy bishop!

- It is impossible to bless the one who stands within the divine uncreated flame, when he performs on the all-holy Altar Table! "The lesser is blessed by the superior", answered the bishop, and the priest asked:

- Is there, by any chance, Most Reverend, any bishop or priest who performs the Divine Liturgy and is not encircled by heavenly light?

This was the simple priest's question.

What answer could the bishop give to that priest who saw the supernatural as the most natural thing in Divine Worship?

This is why he admired the cleanliness, the humility and the holiness of that village priest and departed after he had been benefited and instructed.[1]

After having prayed for God's Dwelling, that is to say for the Church Temple and for all those who enter it in faith and reverence, with this petition of the Great Litany "for the Archbishop..." we ask God to protect with

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[1] Chambakis, Theodora, Abbes, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Thessalonica 1993, p.415

His Grace the ministers of His holy Mysteries as well.

As soon as the name of the bishop is recited by the priests or the deacon, the chanter says: **"many years, Bishop"** and the bishop blesses the people. It is not a case of complimenting the bishop, we do not compliment during the Divine Liturgy. This reference to the bishop's, Metropolitan's, Archbishop's, Patriarch's name, whoever is the one commemorated, whether he is present or not during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, reminds us that we are the Church of Christ, His mystical Body.

The Church is the priest, the people and the Holy Altar Table. Consequently, when we say: "for… all the clergy and the people" - before the Holy Table- the synaxis of the whole Church is sealed through the Holy Spirit. It is the one Ecclesiastical-Liturgical synaxis.

Let us pay special attention to **Saint John Chrysostom's** reference concerning the presbyter who slightly differs from the bishop, for the priest has similar duties as the bishop and ministers all the Mysteries, apart from ordination. Furthermore, the priest cannot consecrate a Church Temple and cannot sanctify the Holy Myrrh.[1]

The bishop, according to the Holy Church Fathers, is "in Christ's image and place"!

The ordination of all three ranks of clergy (Episcopal, Presbytery, Deacon) takes place during the Divine Liturgy. And this is not by chance; it is an event of great significance. The Priesthood and Divine Eucharist cannot be set apart! The greatest Miracle of Miracles of Divine Conversion cannot take place without the Priesthood. Can a Divine Liturgy take place without the priest? No. Hence, ordination will always be celebrated during the Divine Liturgy.

During the first celebration of the Thanksgiving Supper, the night of Great and Holy Thursday, the Lord Christ Himself was the Celebrant; in fact, He also gave a commandment: "this do in remembrance of me".[2] After the Ascension and Pentecost, the twelve Apostles took His place in the synaxis of thanksgiving. Thus, according to our Orthodox faith, the source of Priesthood is God Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the sole and eternal Archpriest of the Church.

As Archpriest, Jesus Christ first offered the One and Eternal Sacrifice on the Cross for our sins. Then, it was offered by the successors of the Great Archpriest Jesus Christ, the Apostles. Later, the Apostles by the laying on of their hands granted Priesthood to their successors, bishops, and presbyters, and again the bishops by laying on their hands on other bishops, others presbyters… (this is the apostolic succession). However, no one becomes a priest by himself. All the clergy have the **One** and **Only** and **Eternal**

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 62,653

[2] Luk. 22,19

Priesthood of Christ, which we are granted during our ordination. This is what we bear all our lives and with it we perform the divine and all-holy Mysteries of the Church and we serve the people of God not our own people! So, we as priests handle not our own but Christ's Priesthood and Archpriesthood and "in [and with] its name" we serve the Church. Therefore, the priest is not just the representative of Christ on earth, but the living presence of Christ among His people!

During every Church service there is the living presence of the bishop, that is why his name is commemorated. Each priest celebrates the Divine Liturgy and the other Mysteries "in the name" of the bishop, which is thus present in the action of the Celebrant-Priest as well as the conscience of the people.

First and foremost, the Church is the Divine Eucharist, Divine Worship, a Eucharistic synaxis and subsequently it is administration and welfare. Primarily, it is Grace and afterwards it is Law.

The bishop and priest are primarily teachers and those who catechize the sacred word, and ministers of the all-holy Mysteries, and then they are administers, that is to say, they are responsible for the works of the Church Temple or the Metropolis or also for philanthropic deeds. I repeat: the priest is first of all, a celebrant, a divine, heavenly living instrument, through whom Divine Grace is imparted to the people, and then all the other things that!!!, that most of the time we ask him to be..., but he is not! The priest is first a celebrant and a father!

The existence and unity of the Church relies on the bishop, who maintains the Priesthood's unceasing continuity. "Wherever there is a bishop, there is a Church." Without Priesthood, there is no Church, there is no Divine Liturgy, and there is no Eucharist.

When the archpriest is clothed in and wears the **omophorion**, (wide, outer episcopal stole) on his shoulders, he says the following: "When Thou didst take upon Thy shoulders human nature which had gone astray, O Christ, Thou didst bear it to heaven unto thy God and Father". In other words, Christ, on Your shoulders You bore the fallen and strayed human nature, which after You saved and deified, You offered it through Your Ascension and gave it all-glorious to God the Father.

The omophorion symbolizes the lost sheep which is saved from eternal death, the devil and sin; He carries it on His shoulders and brings it to the "fold" of the Church where there is the Throne of God and the holy Altar. We see this action in a symbolic way during the Great Entrance when there is a hierarchical Divine Liturgy. One priest goes forward, in front of the icons of hexapteryga and the candles as he carries the omophorion in his hands. When he reaches the solea (part of the nave which stretches in front of the sanctuary and is slightly higher than the floor of the nave), he places it on the bishop's shoulders. He is the lost sheep which advances towards God's Throne for salvation and for whose sake the Sacrifice is taking place.

There is also a similar symbolism when the priest celebrates the Divine Liturgy by himself. During the Great Entrance he places the "Aer", the third covering that covers the Holy Gifts, upon his shoulders and while he is on his way to Golgotha, he at the same time offers the lost sheep, man who has fallen and who has repented, every faithful Christian who is in repentance and who partakes in the Divine Liturgy. He leads man to the all-holy Altar, to the Throne of Holy God's Glory.

The **Bishop's staff** not only signifies authority, is not only the shepherd's rod with which he guides the sheep of Christ's flock but it also symbolizes something else: There is a Cross at the top and on the right and left sides there are also two snakes with their heads turned towards the Cross, with their mouths open and with their poisonous tongues stuck out. These two snakes are the Church's enemies. One of them represents the enemies from within. These are the heresies, deceit, schisms. The other one represents the Church's enemies from the outside which are manifested by the persecutions, the martyrdoms, the Christians' imprisonment, the closing of Church Temples and their alteration into stables or into museums, the bribing of conscience and religious prohibitions as well.

The sign of **blessing** is an act that has its own spiritual interpretation. The priest comes out and blesses. Look at the hand's formation. The small finger is the **"I"** (iota), "Jesus". The two upper fingers form the letter **"X"** (chi) which means "Christos". The other two are the letter **"S"** (sigma), which means "Sotir" (Savior). On the Dome and in any icon of Christ His right hand is in the form of this blessing.

Furthermore, there is spiritual significance in the way we do the sign of the Cross: the three fingers in the right hand that unite symbolize the Holy Trinity and the other two Christ's dual nature.

A Turkish man, Ahmet, took notice of this blessing inside the Church and saw rays of uncreated light being sent forth by the Celebrant Priest's hand towards the hearts of the Christians who were attending the Liturgy. This incident made such a great impression on him - among all the other formidable and fearsome things that he had witnessed - that he wished to become a Christian and later on a Martyr!

We come back to the fifth petition of the Great Litany:

"For our Archbishop..."

The devil fights each member of the clergy furiously and when he does not manage to vanquish him morally, he will not cease to fight him to his

death. He will try with slurs, slanders, false accusations to diminish his weight; he will even attempt to turn hatred and hostility against him, sometimes coming from the priesthood. Church history witnesses that hatred against the members of clergy has even ended up in murder!

The book entitled "The Sayings of the Desert Fathers" refers to the following story:

41. There was once a bishop who had committed a great sin. There was a feast the following day. So, he went to the Church which was having the feast and where of course a large number of people of the Metropolis gathered.

He went to the amvon, took off his omophorion, the symbol of his archpriesthood, left it on the floor and confessed his sin before everyone. And concluded

- I am resigning! I am most unworthy! I am leaving, I cannot... I quit. I am no longer worthy of being your shepherd. You should choose a new bishop to minister you, to preach you, to receive you for confession, and shepherd you.

And he tried to descend the amvon in order to leave. The people reacted! They prevented him from leaving, they held him back.

- Stay there, they told him, we are not letting you go, stay where you are. (They loved him so much!) And may your sin fall upon us! (Amazing were the words, great was their love!) We want you to be our father, everyone cried with one voice.

Being touched by the love of the people, the bishop said:

- If you want me to stay, even though I am unworthy, then you will do whatever I tell you, otherwise I will leave.

- We will do it, everyone agreed, whatever it is you want. Tell us, as long as you stay.

- I will go and lay down in front of the door. All of you will come out and as you will be coming out you will step on my chest and spit on me and say "God forgive him". Then I will stay. All of you, even down to the last one, will pass on top of me!

- We will do it," they said, even though they did not want to, for this was also dreadful.

The Christians did as they were told for they did not want to lose him.

When the last person passed, there was a voice from above, which was heard by both the bishop and the Christians:

- For his great repentance and humility, his sin was forgiven![1]

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[1] Chambakis, Theodora, Abbess, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Thessalonica 1969, p.220

42. A similar incident occurred with the Geronda (a hieromonk, priest, or monk who, ideally has reached dispassion by the grace of God; in a broader sense a spiritual father) of a group of monks on Mount Athos, without having committed any kind of sin, nevertheless, for his disciple's disobedience, who was not asking for forgiveness, he himself sat at the door of the Church Temple after the Divine Liturgy had ended and asked all the monks to pass on top of him and then the insubordinate and disobedient monk would pass last. This is how you gain your brethrens' soul!!![1]

That is why the faithful Orthodox striving Christians, who take their cue from the ethos of the good shepherd's (bishop', priest's, Geronda) self-denial, love him and support him in every way. However, when he reproves and brands sin, and the divergence from ethics, the distortion of faith, heresy, deception and our society's countless evils, then he definitely makes enemies who slander and accuse him falsely. Therefore, it is the devil's primary goal to tarnish the good shepherd's honor, through all kinds of insinuations, barefaced falsehood, etc.

Hence, it is imperative to pray for the priests, something which is done in every Divine Liturgy, Mystery, Matins, Vespers… when we say: "for our Archbishop…", the honorable presbytery, the diaconate in Christ, all the clergy and the laity..", however, in the privacy of our own nightly prayer, we ought to pray for our celebrant priest, our Spiritual father, for all the priests.

"For our Archbishop (name)…, the venerable Presbytery (the priests, that is), the Diaconate in Christ (of the deacons), all the clergy and the people, let us pray to the Lord"

The phrase: **"for all the clergy and the laity"** indicates the unity of the One Church. The Church is the people of God in the eucharistic synaxis, in Divine Worship, together with the bishop, the presbyters and deacons.

And all together we answer: **"Lord, have mercy"**.

In Divine Worship, each faithful Christian is not alone! He is with the other or others, he is with everybody! We are one, clergy and laity: Body of Christ! That is why we pray one for all and all for one, for each one separately and for all together! Everyone for everybody! Individualism and egotism have no place in the Church particularly during the Divine Liturgy. We should pay special attention for often selfishness sways us and we tend to forget all about our brothers and sisters in Christ, thus, making ourselves,

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[1] Personal notes

our problems and needs not only the centre of the world but also the center of the Divine Liturgy itself (!) resulting, of course, in the loss of sacred gifts.

The incident with Prophet Jonah confirms it.[1] "He very much grieved for the pumpkin [because] it withered away" (since it cast its shadow over him) as he was awaiting for the destruction of the city of Nineveh, and he did not grieve for the disappearance of a "great city" that was going to be razed to the ground, according to God's utterance. Unfortunately, that's the way we humans are. For the soulless thing Jonah was distressed. But for the city which would be destroyed, no! Jonah was sad about the inanimate thing for the city which eventually God spared! And then he was sad because God saved the city. However, if Jonah was sorry about the pumpkin, won't God take pity on His creation as long as they repent? Therefore, let us not fall into despair.

The following petition of the Great Litany says:

♦ **"FOR THIS CITY AND EVERY CITY**
AND COUNTRYSIDE
AND THE FAITHFUL WHO DWELL THEREIN,
LET US PRAY TO THE LORD"

The passing over of man's individualism and egocentricity should be stressed in this petition. We experience sociability, mutual support, and mutual assistance as "members of Christ", in the Church, whose course begins here on earth and is led to the heavens. The spiritual support and the "bending" over the sore and troubled heart of the brethren with understanding, sympathy, love, and honesty is sanctification. Sanctification is also a gift of the Church of God but also our own destination on earth.

Our indifference, our coldness, is clearly seen after the Divine Liturgy and particularly after Divine Communion on everyone's faces! So just as tiredness or pain shows on our faces, similarly the sweetness of the soul also shows and is expressed with very eager support towards the other, towards any other person, our neighbor, immediately after the Divine Liturgy, after the Antidoron (holy bread). "A brother helped by a brother is as a strong and high city".[2]

The experiences of Divine Worship are also transferred to those who are on the outside, even if we wish to conceal it. For they give their warmth

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[1] Jon. 4,6-11 [2] Prove. 18,19

to the souls that are chilled, they calm down the troubled hearts, they spread the fragrance of piety, they approach those who hesitate, they relieve the weary, they comfort the distressed. Each one who has acquired a valuable divine gift from Divine Worship passes it on and transfers it. Don't we live, don't we experience, and don't we exist during the Divine Liturgy? Are we as cold as ice? Our behavior will be in accordance with the way we feel! Even before the Divine Liturgy has ended we are already irritated and restless. We see it the moment we take the Antidoron. We are not ready for such gifts!

However, when we have been "cleansed" from our passions and we are righteously and worthily prepared for Holy Communion, then our whole participation in the Divine Worship becomes a heavenly service and holiness in us. And this holiness bears fruit that is beneficial to those who are on the outside and to the whole creation, to the entire world, to all people, the faithful and the unfaithful. The world is saved through the prayers of the saints and the righteous ones. Conversely, the unrepentant sinners, the impious and the blasphemers annihilate the world.

43. Once a little girl approximately eight years old approached me with an air of impudence as well as audacity and told me:

- Father, I swear at the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos!

I remained silent for a while and then I asked:

- My child, why do you swear at Her?

- Out of habit, she answered. My father swears at Her a lot, but my mother also swears at Her sometimes when I irritate her...

Indeed. A little girl swears at the Sacred! What do you think? Will or won't God burn us?[1]

It is not the child but the parents who are at fault. We adults set a bad example. We with our impiety harm the world. The majority of modern Greek Christians do not attend church services. Nor do they go for confession. Nor do they receive Holy Communion; however, if they do it is out of habit. Nor are they abstinent. They are indifferent.

Peoples' sanctification begins within the Church Temple and Divine Worship, with their partaking in other Mysteries, also with the nurturing of repentance, prayer, dual fasting, patience, forbearance, love, tolerance, forgiveness, and with the rest of the most divine virtues.

With pain and tears in our eyes we should all - clergy and laity - confess that in our century sin has escalated, has multiplied terribly and we have additional sins, which were not present during the era of Sodom and Gomorrah, like satanic worship. Even in the smallest villages, people com-

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[1] Personal notes

mit dreadful sins, apart from what is happening here in the big city centers of corruption, of course: crime, narcotics, anarchy, sodomy, witchcraft, satanic worship and any other kind of corruption and transgression. In fact, all these are presented on television as a way of life.

- Why do you do this? You ask someone.
- But this is only natural, they answer.
- Nevertheless, it is a sin!
- I did not know it! Where does it say that it is a sin?

Evil has spread to a great and dangerous extent. And here applies the word of God which says: "for the wages of sin is death".[1] Who saves us? Only the praying saints who attract God's mercy.

We come back to the sixth petition of the Great Litany:

"For this city and every city and countryside..."

The priest's supplication in the Great Litany, "for this city..." refers to the Church, for every Church Temple which is located in every city, village or island. It is a supplication that is not only offered for people but also for objects. The faithful Christians, as persons, here on earth are bound to things. Each person has his own place; in the same way the Church has its own place which is "every city and countryside". Wherever there is a Divine Liturgy there is also the Church.

The love of God is catholic, ecumenical, universal. It embraces all people, all places, all eras and He wishes to transform everything - indeed everything. Our supplication is the outpouring of this love for our neighborhood, our parish, our village, our island, our city, our country. We cannot only pray for ourselves for through Divine Liturgy the faithful Christians who attend Church services become **the soul of the whole world.**

The Christians pray for everyone and everything. They pray for their friends and their enemies, for those who are familiar to them and those who are not, for the good and the bad, for those who tempted them yesterday and those who are tempting them today, for their parents, their brothers and sisters, for their children, their in-laws, for their relatives, their neighbors, for those who are suffering in bed. They pray for those who are in distress and temptation, for every human being, hungry or full, for every city and village and for the Country's needs. They pray for those who suffer every time there is a war where people get killed. They pray for the children who die by the thousands from hunger, while they are full. They pray for the inconsistency, the discord among their politicians for this "deceitful discord" has caused many trials and tribulations to their country, according to our national poet. They pray for their children who are foolish and who are so easily allured to the maelstrom of drugs, anarchy, satanic worship, and gurus. They

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[1] Rom. 6,23

pray for harmony among couples, in order for the foundations of the family not to be shattered and thus cause wrecks with divorces. They are pleased when others rejoice. They sympathize with those who are in pain, in distress, and death. They empathize with poverty, distress, accidents. They cry and sigh together with their brethren who have committed a sin. In the Divine Liturgy everyone and everything is forgiven. Only in this way, we follow the Church's path from pain to joy and from corruption to incorruption.

The Church prays for everyone, however it distinguishes **"the faithful who dwell therein"**, in particular, that is to say the faithful Orthodox Christians who dwell in a city where there is a Church Temple, so that God may protect it:

- Together with the many, the few.
- Together with the righteous ones and for their sake, the transgressors.
- Together with the devout to illuminate the impious.
- Together with the good to bring the bad into line.
- Together with the saints, to save us all, and our Country as well.

"For this city..."

The rural exodus has created numerous great and insurmountable pastoral problems. In the big city centers of our Country, where we live, we many times are in ignorance about what is happening even inside the flat next to us and what kind of drama is taking place! We have all become cement. We have become one and the same with our surroundings: **"For this city..."** we say in the Divine Liturgy, and the Christians are indifferent. If one Christian per family were to go to Church then all the Church Temples would not fit us! The modern Greeks are filled with goods hence comfort has become Christianity as well as the Christian's greatest enemy for his salvation.

The next petition of the Great Litany is:

♦ "FOR HEALTHFUL SEASONS, ABUNDANCE OF THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH AND PEACEFUL TIMES, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD".

"LORD, HAVE MERCY."

With this petition we ask the Lord to grant us the blessing of His divine love. May this blessing fill the air, the earth, the sea, all of creation. We ask all of creation to follow the path that was designated by God the Creator.

The Church prays and is interested in man's bodily needs, their nourishment and preservation. Hence in the Divine Liturgy we ask God to give whatever is good for the earth in order to bear fruit. Good, beneficial and seasonable weather, the sun and the rain, even snow is God's gift for the

"daily bread", which we as Christians ask God for on a daily basis with the prayer "Our Father", that is, with the Lord's Prayer.

The bad thing with drought and constant heat waves is that it creates great dangers for people, animals and forests. In recent years the results are often evident by all of us. (There are special supplications for drought, which are read during the litanies that take place for rain.) This prayer is not only intended for man but for everything that lives on earth.

"For healthful seasons ... and peaceful times..."

"Peaceful times" life's peaceful circumstances and situations are not included this petition. That is to say, it does not refer to the peaceful times, the way we say "to be at peace". No! "Peaceful times" is the atmosphere's favorable weather for the good fruitfulness of the earth. For it is not enough for the heavens to rain, but it is necessary to rain **when** it is needed and **as much as** it is needed, in order for the rain to be beneficial.

"Bad" weather affects rivers, lakes, and the sea unfavorably, and they in turn destroy the fruitfulness of the earth, they destroy the animals as well as the people. Therefore, there should be an excellent collaboration between the sun and the earth where we stand, between the elements of the atmosphere and our whole planet; a kind of collaboration which would ensure the conditions of natural life. The Church calls this good collaboration "peaceful times".

Most of us city people do not understand the meaning behind:

- "healthful seasons,
- abundance of the fruits of the earth,
- and peaceful times",

for we are not in touch with nature, we do not breathe the fresh air of the mountains, we do not drink the cool water from the sources of the rocks, we do not walk in the forests, we do not enjoy the clear starry nights, we do not breathe the fragrance coming from the wild farm flowers. We do not see the sun, we do not step on the soil and we strive for a bit of space which we call "a breath of greenery".

We worry everyday even more about environmental pollution, for the noise which gets on our nerves, for ecological and much other destruction that occur, that increase our anxiety level, cardiac disease, cancer, high blood pressure... For all these the Church prays, the priest prays - even if he is a transgressor - "for healthful..." winds.

44. In Piraeus, many years ago, a man of the clergy was defrocked. After his defrocking since he was a teacher at the same time, he continued to work as a lay person. Of course, he asked to be transferred; he went to a small town far away and stayed there.

During certain feasts he came to Piraeus to see his family and passed by his neighborhood. A woman who recognized him told someone:

- You know? He is defrocked. He was a priest and they "shaved him".

As soon as the lady heard it, without thinking, she raised her two hands and made a rude gesture from behind, as the former priest was passing by.

A year had not gone by when this woman, who had made the rude gesture, died and was buried at the cemetery of the Resurrection.

Three years went by and her exhumation took place. She was all dissolved apart from her two hands which were whole, intact, with the flesh as if she was buried during that minute. They were black it was as if they had painted them at that moment!!! Black, thick hands with big nails, awful in their appearance!

They called the priest of that section of the Cemetery, he read the Trisagion for the dead and the forgiveness Prayer, once, twice, three times... nothing happened!

They notified the Metropolitan at the time, Chrysostom. He immediately came, wore his stole and omoforion, read the archieratical forgiveness Prayer... nothing happened! They were expecting something to happen, but nothing did!

Amongst the relatives and acquaintances, who were present during the exhumation, there was this lady who had shown the dead woman the priest who had been defrocked. She was her neighbor and a distant relative. She thought to herself: She must have done something with her hands for them no to dissolve. She recalled that incident, understood that that was the cause and told them what had happened.

The Metropolitan told them to search for the defrocked priest. Since this incident occurred when schools were closed, the former priest was found in Piraeus.

In the evening he went with the Metropolitan to the Cemetery. The priest and the ones who did the exhumation were present. The other bones were looked after while the hands had been placed at a corner.

The Metropolitan informed the priest who had been defrocked:

- Listen, my child, the Grace of Priesthood has not gone! For the Priesthood is one with you and your soul! Forgive her and say, "loosened and forgiven", place your hands on top of hers and there shall be a miracle.

As soon as the defrocked priest said the words "loosened and forgiven" and was about to touch her hands, the hands dissolved![1]

Each Celebrant Priest is charcoal. If he is blessed, it is burning charcoal and it will burn you. If he is not, whoever he may be, again he is char-

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[1] Personal notes

coal (put out) and you will certainly be blackened. Is there anyone who touched charcoal and did not blacken? Is there anyone who touched charcoal and did not burn?

In fear and terror we realize during the Divine Liturgy that the priest is "an image and place of Christ'. He stands before the fearful Golgotha and performs, even if he is unworthy, the bloodless Sacrifice, as he prays, in the following petition:

♦"FOR TRAVELERS BY SEA, BY LAND AND BY AIR, THE SICK, THE SUFFERING, CAPTIVES, AND THEIR SALVATION, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD".

The Church's interest for all the faithful is characterized by affection. In every Divine Liturgy the Church embraces all the incidents in the lives of Christians. We ought to, especially during the Holy Eucharist, pray for all the faithful: travelers by sea, by land, the sick, the afflicted, the handicapped, the captives...

The Church urges us to do this and we respond in a positive way with the words: **"LORD, HAVE MERCY".**

There are two interpretations to this petition.

- The **first one** considers that the petition refers to the protection of God the Father - which we ask for in our petitions - for all those who are far away, either because they are traveling, or suffering in bed in a certain hospital, or are helpless, captives, or missing in action. We pray that the trials and tribulations of all those people become pathways to His blessed Kingdom, through, of course, our Holy God's protection.
- The **second** interpretation considers that this petition refers to such groups of faithful Christians who despite their will are not present during the Divine Liturgy; they are "those who travel by water, by land, the sick, the afflicted, the handicapped, the captives". It concerns those who cannot and do not have the joy to be with us during the Divine Liturgy. They want to but are not able. They are the ones for whom a Prayer of the Divine Liturgy of **Saint Basil the Great** says **"for those who are absent due to a worthy cause"**. The words "worthy cause" refer to the justifiable circumstances of man's life, mentioned in the petition, namely, travelling, disease and captivity.

And when we perform the Divine Liturgy in case of an emergency, since some Christians have asked us to do so whatever the reason may be, for instance, for health, recovery, settling down, repose... this kind of Divine Liturgy is also performed for all Christians. Its unrivaled value is enjoyed

by everyone, the living and the departed. It is a kind of charity on earth which is universal as well as beneficial for all the departed in Christ.

The Divine Liturgy concerns us all; it is not only a matter of concern for each one of us separately but also for all of us. Thus, we pray that God may preserve, illuminate and save them.

When we say the words **"and for their salvation let us pray to the Lord"**, we do not only mean all those who are traveling by air or by sea or by car, so that they may return home safe and sound and the sick and helpless so that they may recover and those who are captives so that they may be set free, but at the same time, we also mean that they may be saved, namely to have what we have when we participate in the Divine Liturgy and partake of the immaculate Mysteries![1]

Even so, what happens with all the other Christians who are unjustifiably absent from Divine Worship, who are unjustifiably absent from the Sunday Supper? We mean those who consider themselves good Christians, yet they typically attend Church services, three to four times a year. Also, we mean those who go to the Church Temple, only when they have been invited to various Mysteries such as Weddings and Baptisms or to Memorial services. Moreover, we also mean those who run up to the mountains and go to the beach every Sunday morning, without having attended the Church services. Finally, we mean those who say "I believe in God and I love everybody", who keep their faith only for their funeral.

All those are not "absent for a worthy cause". Since they do not want to, they are not present in the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. They do not want to! They do not want the remedy of eternal life! They do not want the taste of immortality! They do not want the "living water", that crystal clear water of heaven, which shall water their hearts and keep them alive standing on their feet, so that they shall not get dry and perish in aridity, that is to say, in spiritual dryness and the aridity of sin and the evil of this world!

Faith lives **only** within the Church and its Mysteries. Only in the Sunday Supper; for in the Common Cup the Whole of God is present. Thus, in order for each believer to be a good Christian, they (except for those who are "absent for a worthy cause") ought to go to Church every Sunday and great feast.

Even though the following story is not directly related to the content of the part of the Divine Liturgy which we are analyzing, nevertheless, it was selected for it is vivid and genuine. The liturgical experiences and similar experiences from the lives of certain clergy are of great interest to readers hence there is enormous benefit.

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...* ibid, p.77

45. A married celebrant priest, in a small town of Chalkidiki narrated to me the following incident that occurred during the Great Entrance, while he was holding the Precious Gifts in his hands, in the presence of a large number of Christians who were attending the Liturgy.

It was on a Saturday, some days before Christmas. As he was standing before the Beautiful Gate and was about to say "and unto ages of ages", and turn in order to enter the Sanctuary, without commemorating, he astonishingly saw about ten Christians, men and women, running towards him, falling before his feet and searching his sticharion (a long tunic with sleeves worn by a deacon and high- ranking orthodox clergy), which was touching the floor.

He did not say a word, he entered and went on with the Divine Liturgy. After the dismissal words "Through the prayers" and as he was distributing the Holy Bread, he requested for an explanation.

They replied that they ran quickly for they thought that from the censer which the sacristan held, the burning charcoal had fallen on the carpet of the Beautiful Gate which in turn was burning it and smoke was coming out...and they wanted to blow it out.

- Did you see anything? The priest asked them.

- No, apart from the smoke, we did not see anything else. What was that? The priest did not respond. However, as he himself was heading towards the Beautiful Gate saying "all of you, the Lord God remember in his Kingdom..." while he was turning towards the sanctuary saying "always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages...", he saw from the base of the Beautiful Gate, before he arrived there, dense clouds of white smoke raising up high.

This was also seen by the Christians who thought that the carpet was burning from the pieces of charcoal in the sacristan's censer.

The white smoke was coming out of the Beautiful Gate. What might the white smoke have been? [1]

46. A similar incident was observed by another celebrant on Mount Athos, where from the same place, namely from the base of the Beautiful Gate - once again during the Great Entrance - white smoke, was spreading inside the whole Church filling the air with an unutterable, extraordinary fragrance. It looked like a white, light blue fog, which spread inside the whole Church, giving it a sweet smell! Everyone felt the sweet fragrance. Everyone breathed in and enjoyed this "fog". In a way, they took it inside them... and gradually of course, it disappeared.[2]

[1,2] Personal notes

And we come to the following petition:

♦ "FOR OUR DELIVERANCE FROM ALL TRIBULATION, WRATH, DANGER AND NECESSITY, LET US PRAY TO THE LORD".

Inside the Church there are on the one hand special, however not isolated individuals. "For none of us liveth to himself",[1] Apostle Paul writes, which means that no one lives by himself and for himself. We are not impersonal figures in the Divine Liturgy. Communion is personal and always in Christ Jesus.

This real "communion" is experienced by each and every one of us separately, in a special, personal way. I will show my interest in one way, you will in another, he will in another. Yet, showing interest, kindness, understanding, if they are the fruits of Holy Communion, are transmitted to our fellow man, during the Divine Liturgy and immediately afterwards.

When the Divine Liturgy ends, I wish as shepherd and spiritual Father, that all of us may have the feeling and experience that we are ONE family in Christ. In other words,

- the Church as mother,
- the Celebrant Priest as father,
- and all the faithful who are attending as children.

This is the image of a holy triune union; the image of the Holy Trinity, where there is a communion of love among the Three Persons. In the Divine Liturgy, all of us together with Christ are members of the one body, not strangers.

Where there is Divine Liturgy there is clergy and laity together with the fire of Divinity, which dispels and makes every sorrow disappear from our lives.

Our Christ's last words to His Disciples, after the Last Supper of Great and Holy Thursday, were: "in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world".[2] Are you in sorrow? "In the world you will have sorrow, but be brave; why? For I have overcome the world!" Grief, pain, danger and necessity are interwoven with the life of a human being in this world. They exist in life, we live them, we see them. Did not Christ say that He has overcome life's sorrows and torments and that He has also overcome the world? Dangers, grief, troubles and life's worries, (when the priest says "from all necessity", he means life's troubles and worries... and generally the bitter difficulties), remain. It is temptation against which we constantly strive. It is evil, wordly, devilish and our own temptation.

In his whole life the faithful Christian struggles with temptation, like Jacob was fighting the Angel, the Angel of God all night long. Our whole

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[1] Rom. 14,7 [2] Jn. 16,33

value as faithful and genuine children of the Triune God, is found in this struggle, in order to become better, in order to obtain "the prize of the high calling",[1] as Paul the Divine stresses.

To sorrow, danger and necessity we should also add the **righteous wrath** of God.

"For our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath..."

What seems in our own eyes as righteous punishment is in reality divine therapy, divine consolation. It is the remedy that saves. Grief, temptation, danger and the wrath of God is the remedy which treats the disease of sin and once again gives us the health of virtue. They are God's loving, educational means. Still, together with the trials what is also given to us is the strength that is proportionate to them so that we can support them.

There are two kinds of temptation that befall the faithful Christian: One gives birth to delight and the other brings forth pain, according to **Saint Maximus the Confessor**. The first one is committed with the person's consent and gives birth to passion and malice. The second one befalls without the faithful Christian's consent therefore it redeems and purifies.[2]

Every fierce temptation and intense ordeal and grief constitutes a very critical point in the life of faithful Christians. Hence, it is necessary to have a lot of faith and great trust in the All-Holy God for man to be able to tolerate life's fierce temptations. The most vivid example that comes from the Holy Bible is Abraham. His tolerance, according to the Holy Fathers, went beyond any Saint's and Martyr's tolerance. It is tremendous, indeed! Abraham heard a voice from above: "Take your one and only son to the mountain and offer him as a sacrifice!" Imagine Sarah! For her to have given birth to him at the age of eighty, to have been given the promise that from this son a multitude of descendants would come forth like the stars in the sky, for God to tell them now "take him, I want you to offer him as a sacrifice up on Mount Morriah"! So, Abraham took his one and only son, he also made him carry the wood - certainly, the symbol of the Cross - and brought him to the mountain to sacrifice, obeying God's word. This deed exceeds any limit, as far as logic is concerned! Thus, his tolerance, the fruit of his absolute trust in God, went beyond the patience of righteous Job.

All the Saints were put to the test in the furnace of sorrow and temptation. Therefore, we, contemporary lukewarm Christians also have to be put to the test! **WE MUST**! We have become way too full of ourselves! Our blasphemy, our disorderly manners, our disbelief, our doubt, our transgressions, and our malice have no limits!

Hence, grief, danger, and necessity are each believer's temptation and trial. The following event which occurred to Saint Nicholas Planas, has also bore witness:

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[1] Phil. 3,14

[2] St. Maximus the Confessor, P.G. 90,593A

47. One morning, as he was performing Orthros in the Church, he at the same time was expecting the women, who had been informed about the fact that he was to perform the Liturgy - and he performed the Liturgy on a daily basis - in order to bring him the prosphoron. However, Orthros was about to end and there wasn't any prosphoron!

He used to perform the Divine Liturgy daily for so many years and now to be forced to interrupt it? That is to say, not to celebrate it for one day? This was inconceivable, it filled him with sorrow! He started crying like a small child. He was crying because he did not have any prosphoron! He could not perform the Divine Liturgy and was hurting! He was hurting!

After a while, he came out fully contented holding a tiny prosphoron, that small, with the seal on it only, small enough to perform the Divine Liturgy.

- Look, he said, what God Who is good sent me on the Holy Altar Table: a fresh - smelling prosphoron! Therefore, we shall continue the Divine Liturgy today as well...

Afterwards, the Conversion... and the Divine Liturgy ended with many tears and in a spirit of compunction for endless hours! Who knows what kind of Liturgy was performed and what kind of Holy Communion was partaken that day![1]

Yet, the faithful Christian, who is God's genuine and obedient child, never leads himself into temptation, and therefore does not provoke God's wrath. Thus, the wrath of God comes "upon the children of disobedience",[2] to those who cause temptation on their own. They give birth to temptation due to their misbehavior.

In order for our deeds to be sealed for being genuine works of patience in sorrows, they need to obtain the seal from the Divine Liturgy. Charity, patience, abstinence, faith, attention to the senses, abstinence of the tongue, purification through repentance, cleanliness, love, goodness, charity, peace, humility, meekness, forbearance, lack of fury... and all the virtues in general, as fruits of the Holy Spirit, are cultivated in the Divine Liturgy and particularly in our own partaking of Holy Communion.

48. Prior to Christmas day in 1992, a woman gave me a copy of her mother's handwritten will, which was full of spelling mistakes and badly written, however it was rich in spiritual content.

This mother had four daughters and a son. All of her five children were married and she had fifteen grandchildren. I will now refer to excerpts of her will:

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[1] Nun Martha, *Saint Nicholas, the priest*, Astir publ., p.43

[2] Eph. 5,6 and Col. 3,6

"My dear children (and she names them one- by - one, her children - daughters and son - her son-in-laws, her daughter-in-law as well as all her grandchildren, twenty-five names altogether).

I embrace you and say farewell. You will open and read this letter after my death...

The first thing you should do early in the morning is wash your face, light the vigil lamp and cense the whole house. Then, you should pray, like I taught you from the Prayer Book. Your husbands, my daughter-in-law and grandchildren will do the same, if they want. Next, you all go to work. Only then God will protect and bless your work and your family.

Every Sunday morning all of you go to Church; the same goes for every great feast. Every night, young and old, before you go to bed read the Compline, the Salutations, the New Testament, the Psalter, and the book "Salvation of sinners".

Do not forget the periods of fasting; keep them all, as I used to since I was six and on.

When, my dear children and grandchildren, you do all these it will be like lighting a candle for me every day. It will be the best, daily memorial service held for me. In this way, you will remember me in your prayers...

... Follow our Country's religious customs and do not take any delight in secular things but put all of it aside and follow the heavens for all (the secular things) are temporary and futile.

All good deeds and charity that are done secretly will be received in eternity. Everything else will end like a dream. You will not be able to take anything with you; neither riches, nor splendor and glory, nor houses. You shall take merely your good deeds and patience.

May you have my blessing and may there be love, first amongst you brothers and sisters, then amongst your families, but also among your relatives and your neighbors and the entire world.

Do good deeds as much as you can and never stay away from Church. And always be forgiving to those who want to harm you.

These feelings of hostility will remain here on earth but also in heaven. For as many years as we live, it will be like yesterday. Hence, do deeds that are good and done in secret.

Lies and injustice to no one not even your enemy.

Never leave the Church and a good Spiritual Father.

All of you will be reading all of this in front of your children, every year after my death will have been completed, after the Trisaghion Service that you hold. This will also be considered as a memorial service for me.

May you have my blessing, my embrace, I bid you farewell and see you again soon in Paradise.

Your Mother and Grandmother."[1]

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[1] Personal notes

This is the advice given by a - 90- year -old granny to her children, her son-in-laws, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. Through this will we see how much she wanted to keep the Orthodox faith united, particularly through Holy Worship. All of her advice aims at the salvation of the soul and adherence to the evangelical commandments. Tradition, Church attendance, the Spiritual Father, fasting, the family, faith, good manners and customs, aim at the unity of the faith and the family with the Church.

After this touching and learning heritage we shall continue the analysis of the Divine Liturgy with the last petition of the Great Litany:

♦ **"HELP US, SAVE US, HAVE MERCY ON US, AND KEEP US, O GOD, BY THY GRACE".**

This petition is said many times, together with the following words: **"Calling to remembrance our all-holy (Panagia), immaculate...,"** in every Small or Great Entrance and in almost all Mysteries.

The tiding that Christ brought to the world is Divine Grace. The evangelical message and the Mystery of the Church is Divine Grace. The Kingdom of Grace is the Kingdom of Heaven. The "truth" of the Gospel is the "grace" of salvation, and the "grace" of salvation is the "truth" of the Gospel.

"Grace" is the love of God. Even though man is guilty, sinful, unworthy of the love and grace of God, however, His compassion and goodness is such that He grants it, He offers it even if the person has not asked for it! He is the One Who grants it! Hence Divine Grace:

- is not the salary for a day's work,
- is not the reward for certain good deeds that we or that man, the Christian does,
- is not the prize for man's hard work and sacrifice in life's struggle.
- Even more of course it is not a counter bid to human sacrifice.

Grace is a gift, a donation, a present!

Thus, our salvation is not the result of certain good deeds or our efforts to achieve virtue but the result of Jesus Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross and His Resurrection. "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law"[1] but "by grace are ye saved".[2] This of course does not mean that man does not have to follow the commandments. He does not follow the commandments in order to be saved by them, but out of love! Only out of love, like the best and most obedient child who loves and listens to his father or mother.

Salvation is: For man to be God's child once again. To get his place back in Paradise, the seat that he had lost with the fall of Adam and Eve. To be

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[1] Gal. 2,16 [2] Eph. 2,8

redeemed from the weight of guilt and transgression which crushes his soul. To experience the joy of redemption from eternal death. In a few words, salvation is: "the remission of sin and life everlasting". Man becomes god according to and with the Grace of God. Yet not by himself, not by pushing God away in order to deify himself after having taken His place!!! Since this is what we do. Nowadays, we deify ourselves. We deify ourselves through selfishness, pride, vanity as well as autonomy.

This truth of grace and salvation we either live it or not. If we live it then we comprehend a great deal and we have strange changes which strengthen the certainty of our faith. If we don't, we are captives of our own passions.

And we proceed to the following petition:

♦ "CALLIING TO REMEMBRANCE OUR ALL-HOLY (PANAGIA), IMMACULATE, MOST BLESSED, AND GLORIOUS LADY THEOTOKOS, AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY, WITH ALL THE SAINTS, LET US COMMEND OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER AND ALL OUR LIFE UNTO CHRIST OUR GOD".

Having the priest's reference before us, **"calling to remembrance our all-holy (Panagia), immaculate..."** (and we make the sign of the Cross, when we mention the name of the Most - Holy (Panagia) Theotokos), the Orthodox Worship world of wonder and brilliance whose unique characteristic is the tribute towards God's Saints and of course towards the Most Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, which is "the Holy one, holier than the Holies", opens before our eyes. The Virgin Mary's, the Most Holy (Panagia) Theotokos' place as far as our faith is concerned, and the name "Theotokos" is the foundation of Orthodoxy since all Dogmas, in a way, are summarized in this word.

The word **"Theotokos"** reveals two things:

First: what the Most Holy (Panagia) Mary is, and **second:** what Christ is.

Christ is both God and man, perfect God and perfect man, the God - man Jesus Christ. This is who the Virgin Mary gave birth to with His dual nature, not as man only, but also as God hence she became Theotokos something that was dogmatized by the **Third Ecumenical Synod**: "Most rightly and truly we proclaim the Holy Virgin... for we eateth God Who was born of her".[1]

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[1] Saint John of Damascus, *Exact publication...*, p.252

The name "Theotokos" introduces us to the Mystery of Christ's divine incarnation, how God became man for us, for our salvation! We Orthodox Christians accept and confess the term "Theotokos", without deifying the Most Holy (Panagia) Virgin Theotokos. We honor the Most Holy (Panagia) Theotokos more than all the Saints and All the Angels. However, even though our Church with its hymnology chants and tells Her: "You, Theotokos hold the second place in the Trinity", nevertheless we do not worship Her as we do with the Triune God or the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Her Son and our God. The veneration that is attributed to her is purely honorable, and devout; it is not cultic. We do not have the papists' heretical belief of worshipping Mary. The Most Holy (Panagia) Theotokos is the Lord's Mother, the Mother of God who has a natural bond that of the mother. This natural bond together with the spiritual one is attributed to Her. The name Theotokos has the greatest honor, which could be attributed to any existing being either in heaven or on earth. She is "more honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim". We run towards Her, as Mother and Intercessor, Leader and the One who listens to our petitions and realizes them quickly. To Her, Who always intercedes for us and for everything else to her Son and our God. The following story witnesses the power of our Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos' intercessions, whenever we run to Her with much fervor and strong faith:

49. Once, around 1900 on Mount Athos there was an incredible Spiritual Father, Father John. He was the Geronda in the cell named after the hymn "It is truly meet", where according to tradition, the Archangel Gabriel in the form of a monk handed out the hymn "It is truly meet" which is dedicated to the Mother of God.

So, Father John was narrating that once a young man, who used to work at Saint Andrews' Skete, in the so-called Serai, went to him for confession and among other things told him the following:

When he was young, he died! His mother immediately rushed to the Church to pray. This took place in the outskirts of Serres.

The women neighbors went directly to the mother's house in order to take care of the child; in other words, they changed his clothes and prepared him for burial.

The mother during an interval of two, three, five hours was at the village's Church Temple praying to the Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos with great fervor. Afterwards, she returned home and told everyone to leave.

They were surprised at her reaction... besides she was a widow with a one and only child and everyone was wondering whether something was wrong with her.

When everyone stepped outside, she changed clothes, got ready, went next to her dead child, lied down and said:

- Rise, my child for you are young. I will take your place. It is the order of the Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos. When you grow-up, you will go to her Garden on Mount Athos to serve Her.

The child was resurrected and the mother died! When He became twenty years old approximately, he went to Mount Athos and was a worker. However, when he went to Father John for confession and told him what had occurred in his life, what his soul saw and heard, while his body remained dead and was taken care of by the women of the village, then the Geronda recommended him to go to a group of monks far away in the area of Katounakia, and there after being tonsured a monk he departed as a holy man a few years later.

Following the death of the young man Father John was telling this incident of the resurrection from the dead, not what the child had seen.[1]

If the prayer of this distressed and faithful mother to the Most-Holy Theotokos brought about such a rich and extraordinary fruit and result, how much more so our petitions, as well as supplications during the Divine Worship, when they are done "with all one's soul and with all one's heart"!

The sermons of **Saint Gregory Palamas** on the Most-Holy Theotokos are remarkable: "No one can approach God, but only through the intercessions of the Most-Holy Theotokos, through the One Who gave birth to the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also, there is no gift (as an expression of Divine grace) that can be given either to the Angels or to faithful Christians; this, is only possible through the Theotokos, the Mother of God.

The Virgin Mary and Theotokos is the Treasurer and Dean of the wealth of the Triune gifts of Divinity and also of all Celestial Powers of the Cherubim and the Seraphim, of the Angels and Archangels that aspire to Her.

And the more they are being burned up by divine love towards Her, the more they love and also wish for the incomprehensible endowment and gifts given by the Triune God through Her.

Similarly, all the devout Christians, men and women, young and old, married and single, receive illumination and strength from God, through the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, depending on the love and devoutness that we have towards Her. The Theotokos has been:

- the Prophets' hypothesis,
- the Apostles' beginning,
- the support of Martyrs,
- the foundation of Teachers,
- the glory of the faithful men on earth,
- the delight of the heavenly Angels,
- the adornment of all creation.

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[1] Ioannikius Arch., *Athonikon Gerontikon*, Kouphalia, Thessalonica 1992², p.221

• She is the beginning and the root of the mystical goods and every Saint's peak and perfection.

Just the mere remembrance of the Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, says the Saint, sanctifies the faithful Christian."[1]

That is why all of us, her children, in every Liturgy

- we also glorify Her
- we are also grateful to Her
- and we also supplicate Her for her fervor protection and intercession.

50. Many years ago, a holy celebrant of the Most High, some time before his repose was asked by a brother priest:

- Why did it take you so long to say the entrance prayers prior to the Divine Liturgy[2] and especially before the icon of the Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos?

The holy celebrant confessed, saying:

- When I was ordained priest, the Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos was the One who placed me before the Altar to kneel and thus receive through the bishop's hands the gift of the Priesthood.

And he started crying. In a while the face of this priest who was about to pass away was glowing and he continued:

- Since then I would not say the entrance prayers, if the Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos did not come to bless me first. Nor had I ever performed the Liturgy without Her being present... And now I am waiting for Her to come and take me. She promised.

At one point, when he pronounced Her name and made the sign of the Cross, the place and his face glowed and "bowing his head, he gave up his spirit." The All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos took him and brought him to the heavens.[3]

This incident is neither extraordinary nor unique. Also, **Geronda Joseph the Cave-Dweller** had been given the same promise by the All-Holy Theotokos (Panagia) forty days prior, that on the day of the feast of Her Dormition, he would be taken by Her to the heavens! And it actually happened.

After all the shocking things that have been said about this holy priest, I dare say: woe to all of today's clergy, bishop's, presbyters, and deacons, and woe to me the sinner and unworthy a thousand times, after what has been

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[1] Saint Gregory Palamas, P.G. 151,461A

[2] **"Kairos"** is the priests' special liturgical preparation that takes place in front of the solea. We say the player "Our Father", then certain Prayers, next we open the Beautiful Gate, kiss the four icons on the iconostasis, we moreover beseech God that He may overshadow us with His Grace so that we may be deemed worthy of the great ministry of the Divine Liturgy and then we read the Dismissal prayer.

[3] Personal notes

said and heard about such worthy Celebrants of the Most High. That is why I would like to ask you to pray a lot to the Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos for me.

"Calling to remembrance our all-holy, immaculate... with all the saints..."

We love and honor the Martyrs of the faith, the Saints, the Righteous, and generally all the Saints with "hymns and spiritual odes", with feasts and celebrations, as they deserve it, for their insurmountable love towards Christ the Savior. If only, all of us were to "imitate the Saints". Only then would we be able to be their fellow students and of course Christ's "joint-heirs". The sweetest consolation that is given to us by the Church is that it keeps us united through the Love which was crucified with all those who are close to the faith, with all the Saints from the beginning until today and forever.

The Saints are "living images" of virtue and sainthood. By honoring the Saints we do not put them in the same place as Christ, but in the intercessor's place and in the place of the Presbyters of the Apocalypse, who in turn worshipped the slaughtered Lamb and were supplicating and offering their incense for us who are striving here on earth. When the Saints are praying for us they kneel before the Lord's feet in the heavens and ask from Jesus Christ for Him to grant us salvation. The Saints ask Christ for our salvation and by this we mean that they intercede for us. Christ the Savior is the only one who saves whereas the Saints merely beseech with their prayers for our salvation which cannot be granted to us by them. They help us, strengthen us, they make sure that we are enlightened, however they do not save us. The Lord saves us. That is why we also do not worship the Saints and the Angels not even our All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos. When we make the sign of the Cross and prostrations before their icons, this is called **"honorable veneration"**. While, the worship of Christ incarnate, of the Triune God is the perfect worship and this is called **"venerational worship"**. **"To honor"** is one thing and **"to worship"** is another.

We honor the Saints as God's friends and also because they are close to Him. When we attribute honor to the Saints and we ask them to help us with our needs and intercede for us, once again it is God Who we glorify. Why? Since they in turn will take our supplications and prayers together with their doxologies to the All-Holy Triune God and thus glory will become greater, it will increase. Through the Saint's intercessions the Name of our Lord is magnified and the Most-Holy God is glorified.

All the heretics, Protestants and especially the Jehovah Witnesses reject the Saints. Our Holy Church through the Holy Bible and Holy Tradition has a lot to teach us about the Saints, which for us Orthodox Christians constitute our faith.

I believe that all of you have venerated holy Relics and all of you have

felt one way or another their beneficial effect both from their fragrance and from your lips' contact with them and other spiritual experiences: joy, peaceful thoughts, warmth of the body and of the heart, delight, devoutness, tears of repentance, deliverance from temptation, even a miracle.

"Let us commend ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God."

We should totally surrender ourselves and the others to God. When however the priest says "and each other", he does not refer to our partner and children. He refers to all the others who are in the Church Temple. A crowded Church - one that is filled with warm Orthodox and faithful hearts- many times is the incentive for willingness for Church attendance, for repentance, for study, for working on the virtues, for fighting against passions, for prayer, for fasting, and all of them together.

All of us are one soul, one heart, one Faith, one Church. During the Divine Worship, inside the Church Temple we should support one another and find peace and rest in one another, according to the Holy Apostle Paul's exhortation "to the end may ye be established" and "comforted".[1]

It is Christ we received, it is Christ we will grant and it is Christ that we will receive from the other. We who did not receive Holy Communion, should approach the one who did, so that they will transmit Christ to us with their exhale, with the touch of their hand, with their warm hand shake. The Celebrant will lay his hand on our head. Why does he do that? It is simple; what he partook as Celebrant of the immaculate Mysteries is what he wants to transmit, what he wants to grant: Divine Grace.

To this exhortation the laity responds through the chantors:

♦ "TO THEE, O LORD."

"To You, oh Lord". "Yes, Lord, to You we surrender ourselves and in Your hands we entrust all of our lives, our own and that of others."

Inside the Church Temple we never pray alone, but with God's people and with all the Saints and with all the Angelic Orders. The entire celestial world, all the Triumphant Church as wel as the Church Militant is present. All of us, together with all the Saints, gathered in every Holy Church Temple in the Name of Jesus Christ perform the Divine Liturgy. Inside the Church Temple we are not an anonymous crowd, nor a mass of people, nor an impersonal mob, as in the case of political meetings; but we are a particular community of persons of whom each one has their own name, identity,

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[1] Rom. 1, 11-12

personality, freedom. We are a community of persons, we pray for one another and all of us for everybody. This is what the words **"ourselves and each other"** means.

And since it is not easy to surrender ourselves to God and leave ourselves in His hands, in His Grace, this is why we supplicate His Most-Holy Mother and all the Saints to help us: **"...calling to remembrance our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate... Theotokos, with all the saints let us commend...".**

We not only ask for God's goods, but also with the intercessions of the Most-Holy Theotokos and the Saints we put ourselves in a living and reasonable dedication to the Most Holy Triune God.

I repeat that what people have experienced during the Divine Liturgy, the way I have been told, is such that there was a need to classify it in two or three experiences for every sermon, even though they are not related to the part of the Divine Liturgy that we are analyzing. However, in a real way and through experience they attest to the unapproachable grandeur of the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

51. Once a young soul came for confession, nevertheless she was in such a state that she was not allowed to receive Holy Communion. She got angry, her ego was hurt, it seems, and reacted. Since she was the bishop's relative, she protested to him.

The bishop told her:

- On Sunday come to that Church, where I will perform the Divine Liturgy, and I will commune you.

So, the girl went and when she approached the holy Cup, she vomited some black liquid. Naturally, she did not receive Holy Communion for she also had stomach spasms and waited for the following Sunday.

She fasted and went to Church again. As she approached the Holy Cup, her mouth would not open! It was hermetically closed. She tried to open it once, twice, three times..., nothing! She started groaning, "her eyes were popping"... and she moved away.

She remembered her Spiritual Father and went back again. Her Spiritual Father told her:

- You will receive Holy Communion as I have told you, not a day less... and you will witness Divine Grace.

She waited, received Holy Communion as her Spiritual Father had told her and regained peacefulness fully.[1]

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[1] Personal notes

52. A similar event also occurred with Father Iakovos Tsalikis. Once, Father Iakovos told us, the Presbytera and Father Luke from Philotheou monastery who were also present, a Christian believer, a well-known journalist, went to the Monastery of Saint David although he had not prepared himself accordingly with Holy Confession and repentance.

- As I was extending the Holy Spoon, Father Iakovos told us, I saw that he was pitch black, due to his inner confusion, of course. He was unprepared; unclean, impure, in his spiritual dirtiness - this dirtiness is many times evident on our face - apart from the fact that he had got himself mixed up with magic.

- At the same time, he said, I saw, as soon as the Holy Spoon came close to his mouth - all this happened in a flash - a golden glow, like a lightning, came out of It, that is, from the Body and Blood of the Lord, over my head and disappeared, behind the Holy Altar.[1]

Divine Grace, the Holy Spirit fled. And when It flees, then the Holy Communion in our souls becomes "judgment" and "condemnation", a piece of charcoal which burns the heart. It is not light which illuminates, not god-power that reinforces man and - most of all - not a gift that clothes the soul with celestial triune gifts! So, beware! We do not fool around during the Divine Liturgy and Divine Worship...

At the end of the Great Litany or Litany of Peace the priest says:

♦ "FOR UNTO THEE ARE DUE ALL GLORY, HONOR AND WORSHIP TO THE FATHER AND TO THE SON AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, NOW AND EVER, AND UNTO AGES OF AGES".

All the petitions and Prayers of the Divine Liturgy end up in a doxological reference to the Holy Trinity, like:

- "For thine is the might, and thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".
- "For thou art a good God and lovest mankind, and unto thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".

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[1] Personal notes

- "For holy art thou, O our God, and unto thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".
- "That guarded always by thy might we may ascribe glory unto thee to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".
- "Through the compassions of thine only-begotten Son, with whom thou art blessed, together with thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages".
- "For thou art our Sanctification, and unto thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".

The triunity of God, as we can see, is not mentioned only once during the Divine Liturgy, but numerous times; especially, when the chanters chant the Canons, they constantly say "Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit". The dogma of the Holy Trinity is the most important, the most beloved, the fundamental Dogma of our faith. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is our Triune God, the God of Christians. He is One God, but three persons, tri-hypostatic.This Mystery is inconceivable, fearsome, unrivaled to our mind.

The Mystery of the Holy Trinity was unknown to the people of the Old Testament. Only in certain verses the Holy Trinity was projecting some of its rays from its three-glow Divinity and thus peoples' hearts were somewhat enlightened. What however was considered to be covered and darkened for the entire ancient world, even for the Judaic people, revealed itself with its glowing light, when Christ came to the world.

To all those who are in doubt and disbelief as for the Dogma of the Holy Trinity, we make reference to holy Augustine's example:

53. As Saint Augustine was weary with thoughts pertaining to the Dogma of the Holy Trinity, particularly with the consubstantial nature of the Divinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, he was once walking by the shore.

There he saw a small child who had made a hole in the sand and with a small bucket he would take water from the sea and throw it in it. It was coming and going; the child was coming and going...

So, holy Augustine was observing it, who knows for how long. Finally, he approached the child and said:

- What are you doing here, little one?

- You see, I am trying to pour the sea into the hole.

- Well, my boy, he tells him, can all the sea be emptied into this hole? Can it contain it? Impossible!

- If this hole cannot contain the sea and if this is implausible and impossible, the same and much more holds true for the Infinity of God,

the Infinity of the Holy Trinity, God's Mysteries..., your limited mind cannot contain it..., the child (who was an Angel of the Lord) told him and disappeared.[1]

Hence, all the petitions and Prayers of the Divine Liturgy, but also those of every Mystery, end up in a doxological hymn towards the Holy Trinity. For, whatever occurs in Divine Worship, inside the Holy Church Temple and in every Church Temple, the living Triune God is present! And through the Holy Spirit we are all being helped, barring no one. He prays with us, "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered".[2]

If our Triune God is not present, living, real, within us, around us, on the Holy Table, if He is not "ever present" and especially inside the Church Temple, then our Divine Worship would be hollow voices, lost in the air, like those of Baal's priests, who would cry from morning until night before the Prophet Elijah and their kings, so that the wood of the idolaters' sacrifice would catch fire. The sacred text says word for word: "and there was no voice, neither was there hearing".[3] And this phrase went down in history and we frequently use it. No one listened, no one responded.

54. Prophet Elijah wanted to prove to Baal's priests', to the Israelites and to the impious kings, particularly to Queen Jezebel, who was pursuing him and was trying to disseminate Baal's worship to the people of Israel, who the real God is:

- We will gather wood in order to make a sacrifice. You can gather it here and say your prayers and I will gather it there, he told them. Whoever puts the wood on fire with their prayers means that they are calling upon the true God.

In fact, from morning until night the priests of Baal would cry, but the wood would not catch fire.

The prophet gathered wood, soaked it with a lot of water and actually created a small ditch with water around the wood!

He raised his hands once and before putting them down, although the sky was clear, awful lightning fell upon the wood even the rocks and set it on fire, burning everything!

The three-hundred idolatrous priests of Baal were then slaughtered. And after wards Jezebel's hatred was made stronger. She pursued the Prophet and in turn he took refuge up in the mountains...[4]

Since our Triune God is in fact present, living, real, inside our Church Temple, as in every Orthodox Temple, that is why our communion with

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[1] Kantiotis Aug., Metrop. Florinas, *On the Divine Liturgy*, issue A... ibid, p.39

[2] Rom. 8,26 [3] III Kings 18,26 [4] III Kings 18,19-40

God is living, real. It is union, it is **union with God**. The priest, the Celebrant of the Most High, before the Holy Table, prays, supplicates, gives thanks, and glorifies God, raising his hands towards Him like Moses. What takes place during the Divine Worship reveals to us how Good and Merciful God is, Whose love is: **inconceivable** in its manifestations; **unlimited** in its size; **unsurpassable** in its offerings, **noble** in its ethos.

From the All-Holy, Trinitarian God we do not accept human charity and compassion during the Divine Worship, but royal love which is prevailing and majestic. A Love that knows what it means to be sacrificed and crucified! This divine, crucified Love spreads the Table of Eternal life and invites us to the Sunday Supper and to the Cup of immortality.

Divine love forces itself - the expression is human, God is never forced - He forces Himself in its offering, for he says: "ought not Christ to have suffered these things?".[1] Love is the one who forces us and pushes us to the Supper of Eternal life. He said it: "compel them to come in".[2] He wants to save us by force, He pushes us to salvation. And we...- what should I say?- we react in a stubborn way. How then can we not glorify and give thanks to the Trininitarian God?

[1] Luk. 24,26

[2] Luk. 14,23

3. THE ANTIPHONS

Following the exclamation **"for unto thee are due all glory, honor and worship..."** we come to the **ANTIPHONS**.

- The **first antiphon** is chanted right after the priest's exclamation "for to Thee belong all glory, honor and worship..."
- The **second antiphon** is chanted after the exclamation "for thine is the might, and thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".
- The **third antiphon** is chanted after the exclamation "for Thou art a good God and lovest mankind, and unto Thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit".

The most common first antiphon is the psalm **"bless the Lord, O my soul"**.[1]
The second one is the psalm **"praise the Lord, O my soul..."**[2]
And the third one is **"The Beatitudes"**.

◆ At the end of the first antiphon the ephymnion (a brief hymn chanted at the end of each antiphon) **"through the intercessions of the Theotokos, Saviour, save us"**, is chanted.

◆ At the end of the second one the brief hymn **"Save us, O Son of God who art risen from the dead, who sing unto thee: Alleluia"**, (is chanted or we can say "...who art wondrous among the saints" on weekdays, or something else, depending on the feast we ARE celebrating).

Next, the hymn **"O only - begotten Son..."** follows.

◆ At the end of the third antiphon the **Dismissal Hymn of the Resurrection** is chanted. If we have a Major feast, the Dismissal hymn of the feast (the Theophany, the Annunciation, The Presentation of the Lord, Christmas), if it is on a weekday, we chant the Dismissal hymn of the Saint we are celebrating. And what is called the Small Entrance takes place.

In the past together with the psalms there also used to be the Prophesies. However, when we chant the psalms, the Messianic psalms are the ones that dominate, for they herald the coming and presence of Christ to the world. Hence, they herald not only His incarnation, but also His evangelical word, His miracles and His entire work for saving the world. It is as if

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[1] Psalm 102,1 [2] Psalm 145,1

the psalms tell us: "Here is the Lord!" and minutes later He appears with the Gospel that is held by the priest at the height of his face, during the Small Entrance.

The Antiphons with the psalms and the Prophecies refer to the time prior to the appearance of John the Baptist in the River Jordan, even before the lamp was lit. Then people were still in need of the Prophecies. Later on, the prophesied Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, made Himself, known Whom John the Forerunner indicates: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world".[1]

The little child that holds the lit candlestick in the Small Entrance and proceeds in front of the priest with the Gospel symbolizes the Honorable Forerunner who with his small lantern indicates Christ's presence in the world as Savior and Redeemer. It is as if he is telling us: "There's, the Lord! There's, Christ! There's the Savior! Bow your heads! Make the sign of the Cross! Keep Him in your hearts! Yes, He is indeed the One who "taketh away the sin of the world", Christ!"

Whatever takes place in Divine Worship takes place in "psalms and hymns and spiritual odes". In the hymns that are chanted by our chanters our own soul definitely participates and many times our hushed voice also participates.

Saint John Chrysostom stresses the way in which we should chant inside the Church: "Every time we chant, in order to attract the Grace of God, it is not essential and entirely necessary for the melody to be in accordance with the rules of melody (we would say with the rules of Byzantine Music). There should be harmony, in fact, there should be sweet melody - they are essential - nevertheless what is needed above all is for our hearts to be "broken and humbled", so that our chanting would identify with, would become one voice with the angelic hymns and doxologies. And if the one who is chanting is young or old, and if he is someone who cannot sing, and if he is someone who does not have the slightest idea about melody and rhythm, it is not a sin. In Divine Worship there is a different need: For our souls to be vigilant. Our mind should not fall asleep, but should be filled with divine light. Our hearts should beat with compunction. Our thoughts should be robust, vigorous and finally, our conscience should be clear and without guilt. If our inner person is distinguished by all of these, the Saint concludes, little emphasis should be placed on a voice that is bad or out of tune or husky.[2]

Furthermore, in the Orthodox Liturgy we do not use and we do not have musical instruments, which many others have.

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[1] Jon. 1,29

[2] Gregory Hierom., *The Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.165

Why is it that we do not have musical instruments?

For, replies **Saint John Chrysostom**, man himself, the faithful Christian who attends Church services in the right way, is a God-created instrument, that, if his soul preserves it without any guilt, clean and spotless, then it is by all means ready to glorify the all-holy triune name of its God and Creator.[1]

The holy hymns and the chanting that causes compunction, says the same Saint, are being born by the soul's devoutness, are being fed by its good conscience and are being accepted by the Same All-Holy Triune God in the treasuries of Heaven.[2]

This parenthesis that deals with the Orthodox view of Saint John Chrysostom was essential since our Divine Worship is celebrated with hymns and psalms. We indicated what our true stance should be, that is to say that the chanting is first and foremost of the heart and then it is of the mouth and vocal chords. This means that no one can refuse their participation in the Divine Liturgy, the reason being that the priest or chanter has a bad voice.

And we proceed to the first antiphon:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name".

Why is it that "my soul blesses the Lord"? For: "compassionate and merciful is the Lord, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy". This verse constitutes the most marvelous summary of the whole psalm. The 102nd psalm is the most wonderful hymn, the greatest doxology that refers to the compassion and exceedingly merciful Holy God. The soul is mostly touched by the ocean of divine mercy, by the infinite philanthropy and forbearance of our Holy God. The whole psalm is chanted in the Holy Monasteries of Mount Athos and in the world when there are all-night vigils in the Church Temples in order for our hearts to be livened up and motivated by a sense of gratitude towards the glorification of God.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul..."

- All our inner strength, all our heart's tremors,
- All the characteristics and abilities of the soul,
- With all our soul, heart, mind, and power,
- Our whole self, blesses, glorifies, praises, gives thanks to, and exalts the Lord unto all ages.

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 55,158

[2] The same, P.G. 46,690C

And how can we not glorify Him? How can we not give thanks to Him, for He is our Benefactor night and day? He awaits for us with open arms in order to grant us Paradise, the heavens, the light, eternity. He is our Benefactor who constantly forgives us, for not a day or hour or moment goes by without falling into sin. He forgives us in a way that there remains no sign of guilt, stain or spot of sin or shade of sin in our soul. He forgives everything!

Therefore, whole psalms or their verses through which God the Word's incarnation is proclaimed, are chanted.

While with the **ephymnions** (brief hymns):

a) "through the intercessions of the Theotokos...",

b) "Save us, O Son of God..." and

c) "O Only-begotten Son..."

reveals that this event has taken place. With the first psalms the incarnation of God, is announced beforehand and proclaimed, and with the second ones it is claimed that the event has taken place, it is in other words, present. God became man and we see in the Small Entrance, at the sight of the Gospel, Him, Whom we worship, face to Face. Him to Whom we pray, Him Whose Holy Body and Precious Blood will partake in a while.

"Only-begotten Son and Word of God, Thou Who art immortal, and didst deign for our salvation to become incarnate of the Holy Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, without change becoming man, and Who wast crucified, O Christ God, trampling down death by death: Thou, Who art one of the Holy Trinity, glorified together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us".

This hymn was written by Justinian the Emperor so that it could be sung in the Great Church that was built by him, that of the Holy Wisdom. Its interpretation is as follows: "Christ, for You are the Only-begotten Son and Word of God, our God, for You are Immortal and Eternal and Who deigned to be incarnate by the Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary for our salvation and become man without ceasing to be God, Who as man wAS crucified and conquered death, for You are the One Person of the Holy Trinity and as God You are glorified together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us."

This troparion is a Christological hymn which includes synoptically six of the articles of the Symbol of Faith. During the first Christian years it was considered to be the "Symbol of Faith" for Christians.

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas says that "with this hymn God is in charge of the battle against evil for the sake of His people, for He also was a perfect man... and as man He conquers sin, as He is unblemished by sin, since He was also God. In this way, the human race is released from disgrace and is crowned with the laurel of victory, for sin has been vanquished".[1]

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,589C

4. THE SMALL ENTRANCE

Following the third petition, the priest takes the Gospel from the Holy Altar and leading the lit lantern and the hexapteryga proceeds to the Small Entrance, while the hymn from the Resurrection or the Dismissal hymn of the feast is being chanted. Simultaneously, he mystically says a Prayer. It is then that each and every one's soul, the moment we see the priest coming out as he is holding the Gospel with the lantern preceding, must "mingle" with the presence of the thousands of Angels and welcome the Lord's entrance not only in the world - for this, as we mentioned, is what the Small Entrance means - but also inside the world of his heart. Then he is also **"blessed"**.

Until the 7th century, the Divine Liturgy used to start with the entrance of the Gospel. The priest clothed in his vestments, would take the Gospel from the Diakonikon (vestry), which was situated in the church portico, he would enter the Nave and from there proceed to the Holy Bema. This is how the first Little Entrance used to be performed. After the 7th century this order which we firmly adhere to to this day was established.

In the Small Entrance we hold the Gospel at the height of our face so that it is covered by Jesus Christ, the coming Lord. The Small Entrance is the entrance of Christ to the world. When Christ came to the world and was born "in the city of Bethlehem", the heavens opened and a large number of hosts of Angels was going up and down from heaven to earth, to the manger (where Christ was born), chanting "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men".[1]

This happened then, in Bethlehem. And now in the Small Entrance, the priest says: **"O Master, Lord our God, who hast appointed in heaven orders and hosts of angels and archangels for the service of thy glory: Cause that with our entrance there may be an entrance of holy angels serving with us and glorifying thy goodness"**.

In order to comprehend the meaning and great value of this Prayer, we will quote several incidents taken from Holy Scripture that are directly related to its high context:

55. The prophet Isaiah saw a throne that was high, higher than any other throne. On this throne, "high and exalted", he saw the Lord sit-

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[1] Luk. 2,14

ting upon it. He saw the temple of God radiant from divine triune Glory and around the throne there were Angels and Archangels.

He also saw the Seraphim; each one of these intangible spirits had six wings. Two of their wings covered their faces, the other two covered their feet and with their last two wings they flew crying to one another and all of them together to the Lord, in divine harmony, with an amazing hymn which was heard (and at times it is also heard here down on earth): "... Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory".[1]

The prophet Daniel similarly describes the Glory of God.

56. He says that God, "the Ancient of days", for Him there is no time, the Eternal, the Immortal, sat upon a throne... and his throne was "a flame of fire". All fire! And "its wheels burning fire". Everything was fire! It was a river, not of water, but of fire, "a stream of fire ... flowed forth before him". Numerous spirits, Angels, Archangels, Cherubim, Seraphim, Principalities, Dominions, Many-Eyed..., were serving the Lord.[2]

This host of Angels and Archangels that surrounds the throne of God, in order to praise and glorify Him, this host came down to earth that unforgettable night of Christ the Savior's Birth, as it is told by Evangelist Luke: "... And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men".[3]

These Angels, these intangible and immortal spirits, during the time when the Divine Liturgy is performed inside the Church Temple, even if the Church Temple is a chapel in the desert, humble, plain, like the cave of Bethlehem, these Angels come down to fill the Church Temple and concebrate with the simple and humble priest, who is the Celebrant of the Most High! Yes, the Angels are performing the Liturgy with him!

The Apocalypse mentions: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round the throne... and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands".[4] Angels in heaven and Angels in the earthly Church Temple, where the fearful Mystery of the Divine Liturgy is performed. The chanters chant, the faithful chant, the Angels also co-chant. A festive concelebration of humans and Angels!

The Prayer's Petition **"O Master, Lord our God..."** is about the coming of Angels and Archangels to the Divine Worship so that they may perform the Liturgy with us. (**"Grant that with our entrance..."**) Symboli-

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[1] Is. 6,1-4
[2] Dan. 7, 9-10
[3] Luk. 2,13-14
[4] Rev. 5,11

cally, the Angelic hosts are represented by the children, who are holding the two icons of Cherubs and are behind the candlestick. It is a fact that the Angels come and triumphantly escort this entrance of the Lord inside the Church Temple which is realized through the Holy Gospel. In the past devout priests would see Angels in this Small Entrance, as of course, during other moments of the Divine Liturgy. Besides, we chant it in the Dismissal hymn of Saint Spyridon: "You had Angels concelebrating O most holy one". This was revealed to Saint Spyridon and it has repeatedly occurred to this day in the hundreds of years that have gone by, to devout priests at certain moments (not always).

57. Once, says Saint Chrysostom, he met a priest who was deemed worthy to witness a large number of Angels, clothed in bright, robes luminous like the sun. They had gathered around him escorting him to the Small Entrance. And something more awesome: he was deemed worthy to be carried up and to be offered their help to perform the Entrance! Next, he says, he saw them surrounding the Holy Table, bowing their heads with great respect. Then again standing in silence and at times chanting liturgical hymns together with the chanters, escorting them in such melody, to the extent that the priest would literally melt.[1]

The Small Entrance accompanied by the Gospel book symbolizes the coming and presence of the Lord to the world. It is a silent revelation; this is why the Holy Gospel book is presented closed.

The gifts of Christ during the Divine Worship are great and inconceivable with the so-called Small Entrance through the Holy Gospel.

58. Some years ago during an all-night vigil, a devout Christian, who found himself in ecstasy, during the Small Entrance "saw" with the eyes of his soul, the Celebrant Priest who instead of raising the Gospel book from the Holy Table in order to give it to the deacon, he was raising a small Infant from the armpits, all-bright, all-glowing, as white as snow handing it over to the deacon who, in turn, held it and proceeded with the Small Entrance.

He said "Wisdom. Stand upright", went to the Beautiful Gate and placed the Divine Infant on the Holy Table, while at the same time together with the priest's voice Angels and laity could be heard chanting: "Come let us worship and bow to Christ...". At that point God's revelation had ended.

When the soul had come round it was filled with awe, admiration and an endless feeling of tranquility. His bodily parts were as light as a

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[1] Gregory Hierom., *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.178

feather and bearing light, there reined absolute peace in his thoughts and spiritual immobility in his senses. This calm psychosomatic condition lasted for days...[1]

The liturgical Prayer in the Small Entrance is a vivid reality. The hymn of the entrance is a true and fearful sermon. This is indicated by the fore mentioned stories. Indeed, the Angels inside the Holy Church Temples are crowded with the faithful forming a union, in a common feast of the heavenly and the earthly! A common hymn, a common Divine Worship as well. It is ONE thanksgiving, ONE doxology, ONE exultation, ONE joyful chanting. Triumphant and Militant are ONE Church. One Faith, One Shepherd, One Lord, Jesus Christ! Heaven and earth are one company on the journey towards the Holy Altar and are both praising and glorifying our Lord Jesus Christ.

However, before the priest says "Wisdom". "Stand upright", he seals in cruciform with his right hand the entrance of the Beautiful Gate and says: **"Blessed is the entrance to Thy Holy Place, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen"**. This blessed entrance depicts on the one hand, the entrance of the archpriest of the Jews "once a year" in the Holy of Holies and on the other especially, the thrice blessed entrance of God's Saints into the Kingdom of Heaven.

"WISDOM. STAND UPRIGHT".

The word **"wisdom"** refers to the Evangelio (Gospel book), which is the Lord, Jesus Christ, the true wisdom, "descended from above".

The phrase **"stand upright"** refers to the faithful. The faithful upright and in a spirit of devoutness should receive the revealed wisdom of God. "Stand upright" that we may raise our minds and hearts in order to pay attention to and see what is happening now: Jesus Christ who is being escorted by Angels and Archangels is here, inside the Church Temple, and they are entering the Holy Altar in order for the Divine Liturgy to occur.

"Wisdom. Stand upright". It is as if the priest announces triumphantly: Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people",[2] in other words, what the Angels told the shepherds. The Christians who attend Church services ought to live the miracle of angelic presence, like the shepherds in Bethlehem! There are special experiential signs for this kind of thing. At times, our senses capture them in ecstasy of soul. At times, they deceive us, for it is the all-wicked one which interferes and wishes to delude us. Therefore, beware!

Hence, the priest wishes that this inconceivable mystery of the presence and concelebration may be experienced by the faithful and by him, our

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Luk. 2,10

soul being clothed in the proper garment, for the Lord together with the Angels is inviting us to partake of the Supper of the Royal Weddings at the Table of Divine Worship. The following story certifies it:

59. As Saint Marcian was heading towards the Church one winter morning, he came across a ragged man who was literally trembling due to the cold weather.

- Would you give me something to wear, father, he was pleading.

The poor man did not have anything. Marcian took out what he was wearing and gave it to the ragged man. He remained naked. He then rushed to the Church, clothed himself in his sacred vestments and was waiting for the Patriarch in order to start the Divine Liturgy.

Meanwhile, the other priests who also clothed themselves arrived and were waiting. (Then, before the 7th century, this is how the Divine Liturgy commenced, in the patriarch's presence. The priests would wait at the entrance of the Church Temple, next the archpriest or patriarch would come, take the Holy Gospel book and thus the Small Entrance took place.)

During the Divine Liturgy, all the faithful and concelebrant priests and other assistants to the bishop who were present, were looking at something and everyone's eyes were looking at Saint Marcian: He was clothed in vestments which were gleaming a thousand times more than those of the patriarch. The simple sacred vestment had been altered into a divinely woven, heavenly, majestic, thrice shiny vestment, from the lightning and beams of Divine Grace!

Then the mumbling of the brothers, the concelebrant priests and the other hierarchs started. "How is it possible for a little priest like him to have vestments that are much brighter than that of the patriarch?!" Since the complaints were taken to the patriarch - besides the patriarch could also see for himself - finally he was forced to call him and told him:

- Come here, Marcian! What a shame. What kind of vestment are you clothed in? Is it permissible for you to wear this kind of vestment?

- What kind of vestment do I have on, All-holy one? Amazed, the Saint asked.

- Well, I even do not have such a bright one!

- Oh, he says, you are teasing me!

- You, says the patriarch, are the one who is teasing me! This here sparkles! There is no need for candles or anything else. The whole Church Temple is lit up!

- All-holy one, replied Saint Marcian, this is the vestment you gave me when you ordained me in the priesthood!

And as he was about to point to the vestment and lift it, everyone saw that he was naked on the inside! And the brilliance of Divine Grace

left and as a result the first shabby vestment remained.

Then the patriarch was illuminated and understood that he was naked on the inside, for he should have given his clothes somewhere.[1]

This is how the priests in the past used to adorn themselves during the Divine Liturgy. We, in order to cover our mess, wear nice vestments... These are the covers!!!

60. When the new Saint of our Church, Father Nicholas Planas, performed the Divine Liturgy he wanted everything to contribute to its splendor. He did not want to have only a small lantern preceding in the Small Entrance, but big lanterns like the ones that are used on Mount Athos. And when he chanted the Beatitudes and the troparion dedicated to the Trinity, he lit many candles before the icon of Christ and generally before the Beautiful Gate.

He used to wear his chasuble (cloak) in such a way that (even though he was very short and stooped), he took a formal stance and there were times when his spiritual stature was actually as high as the sky!

He would chant everything with such compunction that one of the many times while he was chanting in the Church Temple of Saint John he heard Angels chanting the Beatitudes along with him as well as the Triune, the hymn "Holy God" and many others from the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great.

At one point he interrupted the chanting and touching the hand of his spiritual daughter, Gerontissa Martha - whom I met personally and in fact in many occasions I had the opportunity to hear the events that concerned the Geronta and Saint Nicholas Planas from her lips - said:

- Can you hear it? Can you hear? Can you hear the Angels?

- I cannot hear them, my father!

And immediately the priest regretted for having told her and was telling himself: "Oh, I shouldn't have told her! Why did I say that? I shouldn't have told her!"[2]

Whatever takes place in the Church is sealed with the sign of the Cross and every priest's blessing is given in the form of the Cross. The hand of a priest would be good and blessed if during the moment when we kissing are it is in the form of a blessing. The Honorable Cross always and everywhere stands out in the life of faithful Christians.

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[1] Laghis, Matthew, *The great Synaxarion...*, vol. 1, Athens 1990[6], p.219

[2] Nun Martha, *Saint father-Nicholas Planas...*, ibid p.42

61. A young woman made the sign of the Cross when she went to a restaurant to eat with a group of friends.

- What is this? They tell her ironically.

- This," she replied, "is something that humans do, not animals".[1]

After the words **"O come, let us worship and fall down before Christ..."**, the priest enters the Holy Altar, places the Gospel book on the Holy Table, on top of the Holy Antiminsion, and immediately after the following apolytikia are chanted: the Resurrectional, that of the feast's or the Saint's day, the Church Temple's, the Kontakion for the feast and then the Thrice-holy hymn commences.

[1] Personal notes

5. THE THRICE-HOLY HYMN

"HOLY GOD, HOLY MIGHTY, HOLY IMMORTAL, HAVE MERCY ON US".

The Holy Angels, which occasionally accompany devout priests at times of trouble which they encounter in their path, these same Angels will not only be accompanying them with heavenly melodies but also serve them in a practical way when they perform the Divine Liturgy. Indeed, they will! Magnificent images of divine splendor with the presence of myriads of Angels are often pictured in the Holy Bible.

62. One monk, who had attended the Divine Liturgy on a Sunday once told me the following:

The moment when the chanters started chanting the Thrice-holy hymn, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal...", the Church Temple filled with a multitude of young men who were shining in splendor; they were wearing glorious military uniforms and each of them went next to and near every faithful Christian who was attending the Liturgy!... Each brilliantly arrayed soldier next to every Christian!!! And, as they were chanting harmoniously, melodically, heavenly, the hymn "Holy God..." Could the Christians see them by any chance? Could they sense them? Could they understand them? Probably not. Nonetheless, they urged the faithful to chant with all their heart or whisper the words of the hymn: "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us".

The Church Temple, the Divine Worship, the Saints who were shining in splendor, together with the presence of all the Angels, all of them together, one family, one soul, one body, one faith, ONE Church!

The faces of all the faithful were later on bright, serene, and peaceful. All the Christians resembled a child's soul, which took pleasure in its Father's presence. Everything was so strange, so beautiful!... Oh! Why did this all-living heavenly and beauty have to end?

The splendor of the Worship of heaven down here in the Church Temple of the earth! One Liturgy! One Worship! One Thanksgiving! One Church![1]

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[1] Personal notes

It would be wise to recollect the way in which the Thrice-holy hymn was introduced into the Divine Liturgy by Got.

63. The year 433 A.D. when Saint Proclus, Saint John Chrysostom's pupil, was the Patriarch of Constantinople, the city was constantly trembling from small and large earthquakes.

All the Christians, who were Constantinople's inhabitants, had left the city in order to stay in campsites situated in the outskirts of town, where they were constantly praying so that God would give an end to this tribulation. As soon as the earth started shaking the people would pray with the words "Lord, have mercy, Lord, have mercy".

Once, during an earthquake, and while all the Christians were supplicating with the words "Lord, have mercy", an invisible power grabbed a child from the place where the people had gathered and raised it up to the sky! The child vanished! Everyone became stupefied!

A few minutes later, the child descended, once more, in a miraculous way. It then told the Patriarch that it heard a divine voice that was ordering the child to tell the bishop that during litanies, which are held due to the earthquakes, they should from now on chant the following hymn- and the child started chanting- "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us".

Saint Proclus asked the small child to chant it many times for the faithful Christians to learn. Next, all of them held a litany chanting this hymn and the earthquakes ceased.

With the prayer, "Holy God", the earthquake or rather numerous earthquakes stopped![1]

Perhaps a few of them who have studied and are thus boasting about their knowledge in their field of specialty and about many other things, might laugh when they hear this incident and say: "But what is it you are telling us now, father? Earthquakes are natural phenomena. It is the shifting of plates at the bottom of the earth. It is natural phenomena which occur in the world. They are not related to God whatsoever!!" However, the word of God certifies that not only earthquakes but also all other natural phenomena happen in this world for they depend on Him." "Who looketh on the earth and maketh it tremble, Who toucheth the mountains and they smoke".[2]

Most of the time earthquakes are caused by God's distress for our transgressions, which are constantly committed by young and old, clergy and laity, rich and poor, young males and females. Transgression gives birth to evil.[3]

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[1] Paraskevopoulos Yerv. Arch. *Interpretive Overview...*, ibid, p.115

[2] Psalm 103,32

[3] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 50,716

♦ "Holy God".

With this Thrice-holy Hymn the heavenly hosts of Angels and the synaxis (gathering) of the faithful Orthodox Christians are united in an incessant hymning of the Triune God. The Angels are chanting at the heavenly Altar: **"Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Sabbaoth"**. We Christians, here on earth, in the earthly Church Temple also chant: **"Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal..."**.

Whatever takes place in the Jerusalem Above, in the Worship of the Heavens, the Church on earth acts it out with its own Divine Worship in the Holy Altar. Everyday, in every liturgical synaxis of the Church, there is the same incessant Liturgy with heaven above here on earth, in the Church Temples. That is why the monks on Mount Athos, where the Divine Liturgy is performed on a daily basis, are blessed. If we do not become holy and thus be saved, God will not be the one to blame, but we ourselves will be the only to blame. And we, of whom I am the first, are to blame for our transgressions...

When we say **"Holy God"**, we mean it in every sense of the word. It is one thing to say "holy man" and it is another to say "God is **HOLY**". What is the holiest man before God? Saint Anthony, Saint Athanasius, Saint Nicholas or the Apostle Paul? What is a drop in the Pacific Ocean? Nothing! What is a firefly in compared to the sun's beam at midday? Nothing! only God is **HOLY** to a total degree.

♦ "Holy Mighty".

Refers to God's Omnipotence, which is one of God's attributes. Of course, man is also powerful, however the power of man, no matter how great it may be, no matter how many great things he may do, even if he travels to the stars in the sky, is small and trivial compared to God's Omnipotence; it is nothing, zero.

♦ "Holy Immortal".

One other attribute of God is Immortality, in the sense that He is and remains unchangeable, incorrupt and eternal. He is Life; He is the source of Life.

All three attributes that we made reference to, that of **Holiness, Power (of His Omnipotence)**, and **Immortality (of Eternity)**, also refer to the Father and the Son and to the Holy Spirit. "One the Father, One the Son, One the Holy Spirit". Holy Trinity, glory to Thee!

For every human being and every Christian more so, God is the source of holiness so that the former will attain "theosis" (deification), a source of omnipotence for the lethal blow that of the triple evil as well as a source of eternal life, for He created him "according to His likeness"!

We have already mentioned that with the Trisaghion (Thrice-Holy) hymn the Celebrant Priest together with the faithful Christians identify with the

angelical celestial Powers in the act of glorifying the Triune God. Together Heaven and earth are proceeding towards the Altar for a common doxology.

During the time when the **Thrice-Holy Hymn** is being chanted, the Celebrant Priest makes certain movements inside the Holy Altar: he moves from the Holy Altar towards the Holy Prothesis (Table of Offerings) and then returns to his place. These movements symbolize the circular movements of the Cherubim around God's heavenly Throne. In this way, with the angelic Thrice-Holy hymn and the angelic movements in the Holy Bema, we experience the event of the coliturgy of heaven and earth, of the one Church, Triumphant and Militant. As the celebrant heads towards the Holy Prothesis with his arms raised he glorifies God Who is coming to this world in order to suffer for our salvation, and says: **"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"**. He is the "Son of the Blessed- One".[1]

The blessing that we offer Christ at that moment is the blessing that we receive from Christ. We give what we receive. We offer Him good words, coming from the heart, and He offers us Himself, WHO is the **Word** and the **Benevolent** One, through Holy Worship.

As the deacon (if there is one) turns with devoutness towards the synthronon which is in the back of the Holy Altar, and is a symbol of Christ's Episcopal throne, he tells the priest: **"Bless, master, the throne on high"**.

Then the priest, from beside the Holy Altar, with his hands raised, in fear and trembling and exultation "-Rejoice in Him with trembling"[2] - he says: **"Blessed art Thou on the throne of the glory of Thy kingdom, who art enthroned upon the Cherubim, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".** (This phrase is a variation of the verse taken from the hymn of the Three Youths).[3]

As the priest glorifies, he makes reference to the heavenly Seat above and the Throne of Glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and at the same time is imitating the Cherubim, who glorify God. "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place".[4]

The mind feels dizzy, the priest is taken aback, is stunned. For fearful is what is being celebrated and we have great responsibility for what occurs during Holy Worship. There is tremendous responsibility! That is why I am asking you to pray for me... The Divine Liturgy on earth is a real and live enactment of all that which happens in the Liturgy of Glory of the Jerusalem Above.

64. Once Father Philaretos, the Abbott of the Holy Monastery of Konstamonitou on Mount Athos, wished to perform the liturgy to com-

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[1] Mark 14,61 [2] Psalm 2,11 [3] Dan. III.31-32 [4] Jez. III,2

memorate Saint Anthony in a country chapel dedicated to this Saint, situated 500 metros above the Monastery. At night he set off. He also took with him a hand-woven bag, two-three small prosphora and the nama (the wine used in the Holy Eucharist) and with an oil-lantern he set off into the wilderness, which was even more wild during that moonless winter night.

Halfway he stumbled on a rock and fell down. As he fell with the hand-woven bag, the little bottle with the nama broke. He was forced to go back. He took another bottle of nama and restarted his journey for the country chapel. At the same exact point, he fell again! The little bottle of nama broke again! He then got furious and with holy anger said:

- Temptation, the more you break and spill the bottle of nama the more I shall perform the liturgy even if I have to do it ten times!

He returned once again, got the nama and shouting the prayer "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me he set off, arrived at the country chapel and performed the liturgy. Later, two monks also came. They helped him with the chanting and with the entire preparation and celebration of the Divine Liturgy. When he had finished, he said:

- A flock..., a great flock has covered me!...

- What, what? Asked Father Pachomios.

- You see, he says, Angels..., Angels of heaven have filled everything: The Holy Altar, the Church Temple, all the Church Temple, and all around the forest, numerous thousands of Angels and Archangels... and he started crying.

They say that when he performed the Liturgy, he was full of light, full of joy, full of peace, "mindful" in the Divine Liturgy, solemn, tear-filled, according to his biographer. Frequently, very frequently he wept for the carelessness and imperfections of other members of the clergy and priests. He was a priest who performed the Liturgy on earth, but with his mind and heart he at the same time concelebrated in the Altar of the Jerusalem Above. I wonder what he experienced, how he experienced it... What a blessed state, what joy, what divine exultation! No one knows anything about what he experienced but himself, his heart as well as those who surrounded him: the Lord and the Triumphant Church. He was one worthy priest of our time.[1]

After we have listened to the Trisaghion hymn three times, the priest turning towards the laity exclaims in spiritual joy and exultation:

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[1] Kotsonis Ioannikios, *Hieromonk Bouquets from the Garden of Panaghia*, Thessalonica 1992, p.129-130

♦ **"With strength".**

If we analyze and interpret this word, we see that it refers to the trisubstantial and triune Divinity. For God Who is All-Good is One in Three and Three in One, one substance, and nature, therefore He is also one Strength. We magnify this Triune God's one Strength and dominion.

Saint John Chrysostom makes relevant reference to the Thrice-holy hymn: "And although, my good Christian, you are clothed in flesh and bone and in a multitude of weaknesses, nevertheless, you are made worthy together with the Bodiless Powers to praise and glorify the common Bishop and Lord. And despite your personal weaknesses, when you wish with all your might, then "tightly" and psychosomatically through the Holy Spirit you are accompanied by the Cherubim in the Thrice-holy Hymn and with them - peacefully - you glorify the All-holy Triune God. A common heavenly and earthly feast is being set up; one is the Thanksgiving, one the exultation, one the joyful choir ".[1]

While the Trisagion hymn is being chanted, the Celebrant Priest inside the Holy Altar is inaudibly reading one of the most wonderful Prayers of the Divine Liturgy:

"O holy God, who restest in the holy place, who art hymned the seraphim with thrice-holy cry and glorified by the cherubim and worshipped by every heavenly power, who out of nothingness hast brought all things into being, who hast created man according to thine image and likeness and hast adorned him with thine every gift; who givest to him that askest wisdom and understanding, who despisest not the sinner but hast appointed repentance unto salvation, who hast vouchsafed unto us, thy humble and unworthy servants, even in this hour, to stand before the glory of thy Holy altar and to offer the worship and praise which are due unto thee: Thyself, O Master, receive even from the mouth of us sinners the thrice-holy hymn and visit us in thy goodness. Pardon us every transgression both voluntary and involuntary; sanctify our souls and bodies; and grant us to serve thee in holiness all the days of our life, through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and of all the Saints, who from the beginning of the world have been well-pleasing unto thee.

For holy art thou, O our God, and unto thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

This Prayer is divided in two parts: The first part ends with the word **"due unto thee"** and the second one begins with the words **"Thyself, O master, receive even from the mouth of us sinners..."**. The Prayer begins

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 56,97-98

with the priest confessing that God is Holy. He is holy by Himself and to an absolute degree. He is the source of holiness, the source of sanctification.

"O holy God, who restest in the holy place".

Holy as He is, He takes pleasure and rests and dwells in clean hearts that love Him and are devoted to Him.

He is the Creator of the world and the Maker of man. He created the world from nothingness and made man "in his Own image and likeness", so that man would also be a person as God is a Person, and as a person to become like God. God adorned man with every spiritual gift (as an expression of divine grace) and it is He, Who has made us worthy to glorify Him at this moment. On behalf of the synaxis, the priest says all this, face to Face with God, in order to proceed to the petitions. "So You, our God, accept the Thrice-Holy Hymn from us, forgive us our trespasses, sanctify our souls and bodies and make us worthy to worship You all our life." The holy synaxis makes all these petitions to God, highlighting, as always, the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and all the Saints".[1]

Hence, with the **Thrice-Holy Hymn** the heavenly hosts of Angels and the hosts of the faithful Christians on earth who attend Church services are united in an endless and incessant doxology of God. The priest extends his arms like Moses or raises them up high or bends down to the ground, and says the Prayer of the Thrice-Holy Hymn. Our chanters chant the hymn **"Holy God"**, the Thrice-Holy hymn. The Angels who are present are chanting along with us and with them the whole Triumphant Church, united with the Militant, in ONE Church. Joy to the mind, which is informed of them infallibly, experiences them, is informed of them, smells them, tastes them, touches them...

Following the end of the Thrice-Holy hymn, when the bishop performs the liturgy, holding the 'dikerotrikera' in his hands (in the right hand the trikeri and in the left the 'dikeri'), he stands before the Holy Gate and turning towards the icon of the Lord he says: **"O God of hosts, return again; and look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vine, and perfect that which Thy right hand hath planted"**.[2]

The three candles on the 'trikeri' symbolize the Holy Trinity as Light: Light the Father, Light the Son, Light the Holy Spirit, the one three-sun Divinity. The two candles on the 'dikeri' symbolize the two natures of Christ. That is to say, Christ is at the same time God and man, perfect God, and perfect man, the God-Man Jesus Christ. We can observe that the use of the 'dikerotrikera' stresses the two basic Dogmas of our Church: the Triune and the Christological. Without them man cannot be saved.

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozanis, *A Sermon of Spiritual Growth*..., ibid, p.164

[2] Psalm 79,15-16

65. The Lord's vineyard reminds us of a particular apparition of Saint Ephraim the Syrian.

The Saint says: "I saw and what did I see? I saw a climbing vine which had plenty of grapes, but it had sprung with its roots in my tongue. And since it sprung out of my mouth, its vines had spread so much so that they covered all the earth. And all the birds were sitting on the climbing vine, in this vast and endless vineyard, and as they were flying happily over it they would find food and pasture, rich pasture in its grapes... And the more the birds ate its fruit, the more the grapes multiplied... and multiplied more and more".[1]

What divine blessing it would be, if each one of us, priests and bishops, would become such a climbing vine! What a blessing, indeed! What glory for the All-Holy God! However, what lethal injury for demons and what divine salvation for the souls of the devout Orthodox Christians! What a blessed opportunity for the salvation of all the human beings of all the people of the earth, of the whole world. What a blessing!

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit".[2] Saint Ephraim's vision which we so poorly described is directly related to this particular saying of the Lord. For only then does the priest's work perform well, either as a Spiritual father, or as a celebrant, a preacher, a missionary, a simple teacher, a minister in a small village, or even as a family man, when he is embodied into the Divine saving Grace of the God-Man and our Lord Jesus Christ, with steadfast faith, with a humble train of thought, with spiritual zeal and a spirit of self-sacrifice. Certainly then the fruits of his labor through the Holy Spirit will always be abundant, rich, good and saving.

Unfortunately, however, what we observe around us is quite disappointing. There is spiritual drought that is spread in many of the Church's activities. The fault exists on both sides: on the side of the shepherd, who lacks prayer, fasting, vigilance, spiritual forcefulness, and the pain for the salvation of the souls, but also on the side of the people who are being shepherded who, in most cases, are indifferent, lukewarm, and sunk primarily in their own passions and then in material wealth and the cares of the consumer society... The harm however MUST be corrected and the process of correction has to start from us, the shepherds of the rational sheep and Celebrants of the Most High.

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[1] Laghis Matthew, *The Great Synaxarion...*, vol. 1, Athens 1984[6], p.699

[2] John 15,5

6. THE EPISTLE READING

Christ has come; He is the "Blessed is he that cometh",[1] but for a period of thirty years remains in silence. The Lord comes attended by a multitude of Angels, a host of Angels, but is silent. Who is being heard? Who is talking? Saint John the Forerunner who "cries": "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world",[2] and the voice of the Father which urges from heaven: "listen to him".[3]

When does the Lord himself speak during Holy Worship?

Through the **Sacred Readings**: the Epistle and Gospel readings. However, prior to the readings and immediately following the Thrice-holy hymn, the 'prokeimenon' of the Epistle" is read.

What is the PROKEIMENON OF THE EPISTLE?

They are short, verses from the Psalter that reveal God's wonders to us, for example: "God is Great among His Saints...", "Speak Lord and Thy servant listens..." and many more verses.

Saint Germanos tells us that the **"prokeimenons"** symbolize the revelation of divine Mysteries by the Prophets and their foresaging of the spiritual Kingdom of God on earth.[4]

In the past the **"prokeimenon"** was a whole Psalm that the faithful chanted in antiphons, as they were separated into two choruses. Every time we introduce psalms in the Divine Liturgy and we chant them in antiphons, we do so since the psalms reveal the sweetness of the divine and heavenly goods to us. And then the soul is sweetened and rejoices, the eyes become watery, the heart sighs, the senses are cleansed, the mind is illuminated..., and all is radiant and very joyful around us...

On Mount Athos they say: "Prokeimenon of the Epistle" and the verses follow.

During each prokeimenon the priest's exhortation is heard in the words **"Let us attend..."**, that is to say, "let us be careful". Let us be careful for God's wisdom, the wisdom of the sacred word follows. The phrase "let us attend" is repeated at the Gospel reading as well.

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[1] Mat. 21,9 and Psalm117,26 [2] Jn 1,29 [3] Luk. 9,35

[4] Saint Germanos the first of Konstantinople, P.G. 98,412B

"Let us attend…", and again "let us attend…", and again "let us attend…" and despite the constant entreaties for attention, we are not attentive! Forgive me, but we are not attentive!

The Holy Readings are not suggested for leisure, especially when they are "sung". We do not sing the readings! The readings - both the Epistle and the Gospel - are recited harmoniously, in a modest and humble tone, conveying the meaning of the text as much as possible. For with the Holy Readings we also minister the Word of God!

Saint John Chrysostom strictly criticizes those Christians who are not as attentive as they should be with the Holy Readings and says: "The priest is standing before the Holy Gate and exclaims: "let us attend…" many times in fact. However, this entreaty is the voice of the Church but most people do not pay attention to it.

The Reader (the lowest celebrant of the Church consecrated in this office by the laying on of hands) says: "The Reading is according to the Prophecy of Isaiah".

The priest:"Wisdom. Let us attend ".

The Reader once again says: "The reading is according to the Epistle of Paul to the Romans."

The Priest: "Wisdom. Let us attend ".

In the Gospel reading the priest says: "The reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew…, let us attend…"

"Let us attend…", "let us attend…", and no-one attends".

And the Saint continues: "Many say: We will hear the same things again…" again and again. Others again say: We do not understand anything they say…"

And the Saint responds: "How dare you say that whatever it is they read is always the same, for you know neither the names of the Prophets, nor the names of the Apostles, nor the names of the Evangelists? Then again, how do you dare say that you do not understand the sacred texts of the Readings during the Divine Liturgy, when you do not study them at home at all?

So, tell me, don't you advise your children? And even if they tell you "you will always tell us the same things again and again? Will you be giving us a sermon again?" Don't you think that this is insulting to you if they answer you in this way? It is! Likewise, you are an insult to Christ and the Church for having this attitude!"[1]

Therefore, history repeats itself. In order for us not to be "judged", "let us attend! Let us attend!" Let us be attentive!

The **EPISTLE READING** follow; we do not read anonymous texts, but we have the Apostle himself, Paul, Peter, John, and James, who is writing the

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 15,564

epistle, who is present and is talking, through the mouth of the reader, to the Christians during the Divine Liturgy.

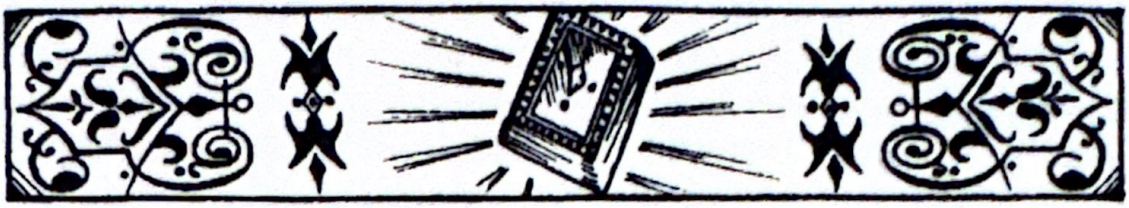
The Epistle reading is not merely a holy text, but the Apostle's holy person, who is speaking and is addressing us all: "Brethren..." This is how all the Epistle readings begin: "Brethren..." and the text continues.

The ancient interpreters explain and tell us that although the Acts and the Epistles are not called "Evangelio" (Gospel), nevertheless, they are an evangelical sermon. The Lord after His Resurrection said to His Apostles: "Go ye into the entire world, and preach the gospel to every creature".[2] Both the Acts and the Epistles constitute the joyful message and the sermon of salvation, that is to say, the "Evangelion" (good tidings).

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas inquires: "Why is it that the Epistle reading precedes the Gospel reading? And he answers: What is said by the Lord Himself is the most perfect revelation, compared to that which is said by the Apostles. And since we mentioned that what is performed in the Divine Liturgy is revealed gradually, there is an upward, gradual journey that is why as we are moving from the lower to the higher, we first read the Epistle readings and then the Gospel readings".[2]

[1] Mar. 16,15

[2] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,416C



7. THE GOSPEL READING

The joy for the exultant message of salvation is expressed with the triple **"ALLELUIA"**, which is chanted by the holy chanters at the end of the Epistle reading and signifies: "praise God".

The word **"alleluia"** itself but also the way in which it is chanted (especially on Mount Athos, during the all-night vigils) reveals that it is an exclamation of joy. It is a joyful welcoming of the Lord, Who is coming through the Gospel to the liturgical synaxis of faithful Christians.

The word **"alleluia"** is related to the Gospel reading, not the Epistle reading. This is why it is chanted majestically, slowly and melodically, twelve times, the same way it is chanted during Great and Holy Week. At the same time the priest censes and the Gospel reading follows. Nowadays, they are read in brief.

The word **"alleluia"** reminds us the 19th chapter of Revelations which is presented in a vivid way and in which the following is described: "John the Evangelist startled "sees" certain impressive new images appearing before him after Babylon's crushing defeat. These scenes are admirable and magnificent, holy and filled with divine light. Evil power has by all means been exterminated and the Evangelist's ears are filled with supercelestial melodies. An infinite number of Angels begins to chant **"alleluia"** in melodic, harmonious voices. (The 19th chapter of Revelations describes the noetic sinful and vulgar Babylon's, great fall. This fall causes such a loud noise that its echoe reaches the sky. And then Christ's glorious Coming follows).

However, what does the word "alleluia" mean?

It means: "Glorify the Lord God!" Praise and glorify the Lord, to Whom we ascribe all glory, honor and worship but also our own salvation! Glorify the Lord, for his judgment is proper and true. Glorify Him, for He at last has condemned Babylon which is corrupted, which with her lewdness has corrupted the inhabitants of the earth. Glorify Him, for He has released us from Sodom's decadence and from the deadly mania against the innocent, faithful Christians. Glorify Him, for He took back the innocent, martyr's blood of His children who were slaughtered by this vulgar Babylon.

"Glorify God", the myriad Angelic voices would say. "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia." Indeed, glorify the Lord, for look! the smoke of noetic Babylon's destruction and disintegration is reaching up to the heavens. At last the antichrist power has received a crushing defeat.

At the same time the twenty four Presbyters, who represent the Triumphant Church of the Saints, fall before the all-glorious and supercelestial Throne of God and prostrate before the Lord, saying and chanting: **"Amen. Alleluia..."** Indeed! Glorify the Lord God Almighty, the entire heavenly Church of the Saints ".[1]

Simultaneously, angelic voices are heard, calling all the devout Christians to glorify God. "All of you, also ought to glorify the Lord our God", the angelic voices were saying. "All of you, whose faith is living and steadfast. All of you, who kept the Lord's word on patience up to the end. All of you, who have devoutness and the fear of God. All of you, who have kept your bodies undefiled and your souls prudent. All of you, who have kept your senses clean and your minds enlightened. All of you, whose eyes have never stopped shedding tears of repentance. All of you, young and old, men and women, who have confessed Christ "crucified". All of you, who belong to the One, Holy, Catholic, Orthodox, and Apostolic Church!"

And then, the Evangelist adds, something great and shocking has occurred: Earth and heavens were filled with melodic voices: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of mighty waters and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, **ALLELUIA**: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"[2]

In the first six verses of chapter 13, the word **"alleluia"** is said four times. What hymn is this fourfold **"alleluia"**! What Cherubic chanting! What joy! What exultation! What glory! What praise! What honor! **"Alleluia"** for Antichrist has received a crushing defeat! **"Alleluia"**, for malice has been wiped out! **"Alleluia"**, for the noetic Babylon has been destroyed!

"Alleluia" is the enthusiastic expression of truth's triumph against falsehood; of justice against injustice! The word **"Alleluia"** is the outpouring of joy and happiness for the triumph of the Slaughtered Lamb against the monsters of Antichrist!

This **"Alleluia"** which is so melodic has become and is a continuous psalmody in the liturgical life of the Church. We hear it numerous times in Divine Worship, in the Psalms of the polyelaions, in the Eulogetaria, in the Salutations, and in Holy Week in the Bridegroom services. The word "Alleluia" is chanted in all holy services.

The word **"Alleluia"** is a continuous exhortation to glorify the Triune God. It is a spiritual hinting, so that the heart may turn towards the habitations of the Saints. It is an arousing of the soul, so that our souls would charge at the heavens and try in some way to imitate the Angels, these heavenly commanders, who never cease "in ceaseless mouths and doxologies" to praise the All-holy and Allmighty God unto the ages! They never cease.

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[1] *"The Savior"* magazine, issue 1565, year 1994, p.454

[2] Rev. 19,6

They never get tired, the Angels and Archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, Thrones, Principalities, Powers, Dominions, Authorities never feel they have praised and glorified the Lord our God enough. They never cease for the Infinite God, All-good and Gift-giver as He is, reveals and uncovers new plaits from the infinite grandeur of His divine uncreated Properties. Every moment through the ages of ages, timelessly, He adds glory to glory, gladness to gladness, peace to peace, love to love, blessedness to blessedness, rejoicing to rejoicing, new divine light to the existing uncreated light, theology to divine knowledge and so many other multiple, interchangeable, many diverse and infinite manifestations of His Divine Love and Providence towards His reasonable creatures, men and Angels but also towards inanimate creation.

All these indescribable and unutterable gifts of Paradise and divine beauty are gifts, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man".[1] "It is praise and a hymn of all creation towards the all-holy Triune God!"[2] And since the word **"Alleluia"** is praise and a doxology towards God-man-loving, this means that we have many reasons to glorify Christ, the Savior of our souls:

- The **first** reason is that Orthodox parents gave birth to us and today we are present in a common reasonable Divine Worship, in the Ark of the Church and not in the darkness of lack of faith, deception and heresy. NOT INSIDE HALLS, but inside the Church Temple!
- The **second** reason is Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross, through which we are partakers of the triumph of Resurrection and the victory against the devil and his evil spirits.
- The **third** reason is the remission of sins and the salvation of our soul, which He grants to us.
- The **fourth** reason is His All-Holy Body and His Precious Blood, which He offers us as nourishment for immortality.
- The **fifth** reason..., sixth reason, seventh reason..., myriad of reasons, which are never-ending, for there are billion of reasons for which we owe God gratitude, thanksgiving and doxology!

All of God's benevolence -spiritual and material, temporary and eternal, old and new...- and all the profound emotions and agony that we have experienced by following the evangelical law and living in a spirit of repentance and that of Divine Worship, urge us to exclaim continuously: **"alleluia, alleluia, alleluia"**!

As far as the action of censing during the multiple **"alleluia"** is concerned, it symbolizes the Grace of the Holy Spirit; and just as the smell of incense is spread throughout the whole Church Temple, likewise the Grace

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[1] I Cor. 2,9

[2] *"The Savior"* magazine, ibid, p.455 (adapted excerpts)

of the evangelical word, like uncreated sweet-smelling fragrance enters into the souls of Christians who in turn attend the Gospel reading with great devoutness. "My brethren, praise the Lord! Amen".

66. A disciple monk (who was under the obedience of his Geronta) in Katounakia - Mount Athos, once told him:

- Geronta, they are asking to see you.

- Who?

- Three theology teachers from the world.

- And what do they want?

- They want you to tell them words of wisdom.

- Answer them: "Read the New Testament and the Psalter on a daily basis. They have even forgotten what color these sacred books have! The Gospel says it all. Solves it all. Has all the Knowledge, all the Wisdom, all the Life! You go and tell them that!"

The monk told them the words of the Gerontas and they left in disgrace and in deep thought. The teaching of the desert was well- taught. This occurred during our time.[1]

Prior to the Gospel reading the following Prayer is read:

"Illumine our hearts, O Master who lovest mankind, with the pure light of thy divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of thy gospel teachings; implant in us also the fear of thy blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we many enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto thee. For thou art the Illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto thee we ascribe glory, together with thine unoriginate Father, and thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

The Prayer's translation is as follows: "Shine in our hearts, Master and Lover of mankind, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our intellect so that we may comprehend Your evangelical word. Root in us the fear of Your holy commandments, in order to trample on all desires of the flesh and live a spiritual life, that is to say, to believe and act according to that which is pleasing to You..."

In order to comprehend this Prayer we should read carefully chapter IV taken from Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians, verses 3-6 which approximately tell us the following: "Many times the Gospel sermon is concealed and incomprehensible to those who are willing to walk on the path of destruction. Satan, the god of this century, blinds the thought of those who are

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[1] Gerondas Joseph Vatopedinos, *The charismatic disciple, Gerondas Ephraim Katounakiotis*, Psychopheli Vatopedina 12, 2001, p.165

unfaithful and unrepentant transgressors so that they may not be able to see the light of the Gospel that reveals the glory of Christ, Who is God's Image and God. For we do not preach about ourselves but Jesus Christ as the Lord of Glory".

These verses tell us about two kinds of darkness and light. The one darkness was that which covered the earth, before God created light. "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. But the earth was unsightly and unfurnished, and darkness was over the deep".[1] But when God said "let there be light",[2] then darkness dispersed. Thus, there is natural darkness and natural light.

However, we are also spiritually darkened, as we can be spiritually enlightened. When Adam was created "according to God's image and likeness", his nous (mind) was all light, clear and lucid. The primordial gifts of divine Justice used to work perfectly. He had the potential to choose, to be free, to have a will, to live without sin, to be immortal. Notwithstanding, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's will, then the soul's noetic light was covered in darkness. That is why we say, "God's image was tarnished and the mind of man was darkened" - as a result of the fall. Even so, God, Who said: "let there be light, and there was light", through our Lord Jesus Christ, His Only-begotten Son who became man shined the spiritual light, and all of humanity was illuminated.

Therefore, Christ is the spiritual Sun of humanity. However man's wretched "ego" does not wish to open his eyes before the Sun - Christ to be illumined. Like those who suffer from an eye disease and are annoyed by the light, they avoid it and prefer to live in shady places and wear sunglasses or anything else they can, likewise, those who suffer from their ego and pride, are weak in the vision of their soul. They detest and avert the Light that is rich and beneficial. Do you know what Christ said? "...light came into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved ".[3]

Hence, the person who is aware of his sinful state is at the same time aware of the need to be enlightened by Christ. Without Christ's enlightenment, and despite the knowledge and education of the world that a person may have obtained, he nevertheless remains in the dark. He does not know where he came from and where he stands, where he is going, where his destination is, and where his soul is going after death.

Therefore, prior to reading the Gospel - in the Divine Liturgy- we the priests ask our Lord, Who is the Sun of Righteousness, the light of the knowledge of God, and as the Three-sun Divinity to grant it to our souls. The light of the knowledge of God is also granted by the Lord through the

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[1] Gen. 1,1-2 [2] Gen. 1,3 [3] Jn 3,19-20

Gospel reading, as simple as it may sound, as simple as the reading may be. That is why, it is necessary to read and study the New Testament on a daily basis. The mind is illuminated, the heart is sweetened, the will is strengthened, and man is cleansed from his passions. The knowledge of God is a seed which gives birth to salvation, to life within man. Therefore, search the Scriptures; "and they are they which testify of me".[1]

The knowledge of God should co-exist with the daily application of the gospel commandments. If we yearn for the light of God we ought to work the gospel commandments. We should reject the ideology of the flesh and wicked desire. We should partake of the all-immaculate Mysteries. Repentance, tearing, fasting, abstinence, prayer, vigil, the battle against passions..., all these have the first place, if we wish for the light of the knowledge of God to shine within our souls. Only in this way, can we follow the **"spiritual lifestyle "**, which we ask for with the Prayer. In this purified way of life and state we get to know the philanthropic God as He wishes to reveal Himself to us.

"For thou art the Illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God..." the Prayer ends. The pure and unspoiled way of life illumines not only souls, but also bodies! That is why, many peoples' countenance glows and is bright. This originates from the pure light of the soul within. This divine light not only illumines but it also embellishes the person without the use of creams and cosmetics.

67. My presbytera and I had met Saint Nectarios' subdeaconess, Gerondissa Magdalene. This ninety year old lady's countenance was so bright that it glowed in the dark while she was talking to us. It was the face of a small child and it was as bright as the countenance of an Angel. She had all-noble heavenly beauty which caused such admiration that all the women in the world would envy! It was a Heavenly beauty out of this world.[2]

If you approach the person who is illumined by divine light in order to touch him, you can feel a sweet warmth..., the warmth of the Holy Spirit and the fragrance of heaven. These are granted by Divine Worship, by the Divine Liturgy, by a prudent way of life, by purity of the body and soul, by keeping the commandments, and participation in the all holy Mysteries.

68. I recall what I was told about a priest in Ano Vrondou (before world war II), who was once ill with a high temperature, but due to the fact that it was the dawn of a great day, he had to perform the Divine

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[1] Jn 5,39

[2] Personal notes

Liturgy so that his Christian congregation would not miss the Liturgy.

He exited the Altar in order to read the Gospel as he was holding the Holy book in his hands. The Gospel book was heavy; there was not a stand to place it on... He was thinking to himself:

- So, my Christ, what am I to do? You have so many millions and billions of Angels, why don't you send a couple so they may hold the Gospel for me?! How am I to hold it? I have 40 degrees temperature!

And it was held by Angels![1]

So, here is the incomprehensible mystery of God and the Divine Liturgy. We are not able to see it for we do not see with the eyes of our souls. We are not able to hear it, for we are "deaf". That is why, the Lord says every so often "He who hath ears to hear, let him hear". With the eyes of our soul we will see the spiritual things, we will see the heavenly things - whatever is to our advantage.

That which is said and done during the Divine Liturgy, might seem unfamiliar, weird, out of this world. In fact, they are not! They are for us! Whatever God has in heaven, He brings it down and grants it to earth! Let us cleanse our hearts and then we will see it in practice.

69. Once two monks, a Geronda with his disciple, were climbing the summit of Mount Athos in order to perform the Liturgy in the chapel of the Transfiguration of Christ. They were the Greek-Russian Father Averkios with his disciple Father Prochoros.

Finally, they reached the summit and spent the night at the Holy Theotokos' Kathisma, where the Most-Holy Theotokos had appeared to Saint Maximus the Hutburner.

Following their frugal dinner, they read the Small Compline and the Hymns to the Theotokos and then they were to go to get some rest in two separate cells. Then the Geronda tells his disciple:

- Look, before you go to sleep read the whole Gospel according to Matthew and then go to bed.

- With your blessing, said the disciple.

However, he went to his cell, locked the door and went to bed, without doing that which his Geronda had told him.

After midnight Geronda heard loud screaming. Somebody was calling for help. He wakes up in fear, and jumps up...; the screaming was heard from the cell of the disciple who was under the Geronda's obedience. He runs outside.

- What is going on? He asks him. My child, why are you yelling?

- The demons are beating me! He says. Geronda...help!

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[1] Personal notes

The Geronda runs, takes his Cross, goes and starts making the sign of the cross on the door and saying Prayers of exorcism that he knew by heart. Nothing! He once again makes the sign of the cross on the door; once again he says the Prayers, and again nothing! He tries to open the door, impossible! It was locked on the inside. Meanwhile the monk was being beaten...

Then Father Averkios steps outside, goes to the cell's window, which was fortunately open and tells the demons in a commanding voice:

- You don't have the right to beat my disciple.

Right then the demons disappeared! For the monks know that only their Geronda has rights over the underling.

Father Prochoros thus paid for his disobedience. The blessed one, if he were obedient and had read the Gospel, he would have been at peace and would have slept safe and sound.[1]

"WISDOM. STAND UPRIGHT. LET US HEAR THE HOLY GOSPEL. PEACE BE TO ALL".

Since the first years of the Sunday Supper there was an order and rule that the Christians listen to the word of God, i.e. the Gospel reading, standing upright. Celebrants and laity, in total silence and respect, listen to the Holy Reading, the Holy Gospel.

However, the exhortation: **"Stand upright"** also have a deeper meaning. It is the second time it is being said. (The first time it is said during the Small Entrance, when the priest raises the Gospel book crosswise and says: **"Wisdom. Stand upright"** and the second time before the reading of the Holy Gospel).

Notwithstanding, the Celebrant Priest not only says the words **"Wisdom. Stand upright"**; but he also adds his blessing by making the sign of the Cross and says:

"Peace be to all". Peace to all of you.

And the laity replies through the holy chanters:

"And to thy spirit". We should not only listen to the Holy Gospel standing upright physically and psychologically, but also in peace. This is what the priest wishes the laity and in turn, the laity wishes the priest.

The priest's blessing in the words **"peace be to all"**, according to **Saint Isidore of Pelusium**, is the same exact blessing of Christ. Why? For it

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[1] Archmandrite Ioannikios, *Athonikon Gerondikon*, ibid , p.287

is the last visual image of Christ on earth.[1] As He was ascending to the heavens blessing His disciples, that is to say, during His Ascension, we had this visual image. "And it came to pass, while he blessed them", namely, while Christ was blessing the Disciples, "he was parted from them", He was separated from them "and carried up into heaven",[2] he started ascending into heaven. In other words: until the day of His Second Coming, when He will judge the world, Jesus Christ, the Savior of man, will bless the whole world through the priest. Until then, the blessing of the Ascension and the intercession of the Son, Who sits at the right hand of God the Father in enormous Glory, will continue. Therefore, when the priest blesses us, he imparts to us the godmanly blessing of Christ.

70. In the Synaxarion (a collection of brief hagiographical texts) of the New martyrs by Saint Nikodemos the Aghiorite, Ahmed's incident is documented. It mentions that when the latter entered the Church Temple he saw rays, beams of light coming out from the priest's fingers and heading towards the hearts of the Christians. This is the miracle of blessing![3]

Before the Gospel excerpt is read in a melodic way, the Evangelist is being announced. The priest says: "the reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew" (or Mark, or Luke, or John). Whoever the Evangelist may be, one thing is certain, that the Gospel is all that was said and practised by our Lord Jesus Christ. The miracles, the sermons, the laws, the commandments that he established, as well as all that He suffered: the reproaches, the dreadful Passion, His Crucifixion, His Death, His Resurrection that is to say, His whole life from the Annunciation and His Birth "in the city of Bethlehem", to His Ascension.

Hence, the Gospel is not only a description of certain historical events from the life of Christ. It not only leads us to past events, but at the same time it takes us through His teachings to the Kingdom of Heaven! John the Evangelist assures us: "but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name".[4] It is not history but **post - history**; it is the Revelation of the living God.

The Gospel also reveals to us the end of the physical world; that this

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[1] Saint Isidore of Pelusium, P.G. 78,265C

[2] Luk. 24,51

[3] Saint Nikodemus the Aghiorite, *Synaxarion of the New Martyrs*, Thessalonica 1984, p.509

[4] Jn. 20,31

end will come, that it is coming and that with our death it has already come! For with death comes the first partial Judgment.

The reading of the Gospel is not realized in order to teach us merely what happened "at that time", but in order to proclaim and convey the message of the end of this world and of Christ's Second Coming. It trumpets the good tiding of our salvation but through repentance. "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand".[1] This is how the Lord started His preaching. Become fellow citizens of heaven now, before you are seized by death. This is the message of the reading of the Gospel excerpt in Divine Worship; this is what the priest says.

The Word of God through the Gospel and the Holy Cup - both of them- are called **"Eucharist"**. In other words we priests see, however you can also see from the outside, that both the Holy Gospel and the Holy Cup, have their place on the Holy Table.

In the first or introductory part of the Divine Liturgy up to the Prayers of the Catechumens, the Gospel has the first place on the Holy Table. After the Gospel reading the Gospel is set aside, the Holy Antiminsion is unfolded and on top of it, after the Great Entrance, the Precious Gifts are placed.

We venerate the Gospel book, which is the liturgical holy book of the Church, with the sign of the Cross; we embrace and kiss it many times with our eyes and lips and with all our heart.

When the Gospel reading ends, the priest closes the Gospel book and while the words **"Glory to Thee, O Lord. Glory to Thee"**- are being chanted very slowly - according to the old typikon - he himself walks among all the faithful in the Church Temple and every Christian first, makes the sign of the Cross and then kisses it. Today, this action has been moved to the Orthros (Matins) and on Sundays only, when the eleven Morning Gospels are read and while the 50th Psalm is being chanted slowly, the priest holding the Gospel book at the height of his face and as his hands are covered by the vestments, he stands at the center of the Church Temple and all the Christians pass one-by-one, in order and silence, and venerate it. After it has been venerated, the Gospel book is placed on the Narthex or on another Holy icon stand in the back of the Church Temple, so that the late coming Christians can venerate it afterward.

There are also two very good customs, which demonstrate devoutness and respect towards the Gospel reading but also towards the Gospel itself.

- The **first** one: if the faithful are entering the Church Temple when the Gospel is being read, they stand still in the Narthex and they do not pro-

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[1] Mat. 4,17

ceed in order to enter the Nave. It is an exceptional moment when the Gospel is read in our Orthodox Worship and everyone stands still. As soon as the Gospel reading ends, they enter the Nave.

(Furthermore, we stand still and do not move about in Church when the Six Psalms are being read in the morning during Orthros (Matins). The time spent for the reading of the Six Psalms represents the time the Second Coming will last. It is so short "in the twinkling of an eye". As soon as the Second Coming occurs, time is abolished and God's Judgment begins... My Christ, save us.)

- The **second** custom is: When the Gospel is read in the Beautiful Gate many mothers with their children - especially in villages - approach and kneel under the holy book. It is as if the word of God is poured to them, covering and bathing them with its living power, like the power that was sent forth by Christ "and healed them all".[1]

However, in order to avoid disorder and noise, this custom has been brought to an end. During the first centuries all the used to listen to the Evangelical reading with their hands elevated. Yet, this custom has also waned and Christians through the years it was stamped out completely. There should be order, respect, and uniformity during Divine Worship.

The Gospel of the Matins is read from inside the Holy Bema, on the right side of the Holy Table. Why? For the Gospel of the Matins as content refers to the events of the Resurrection and the priest, who reads the passage from the Gospel, takes on the role of the Angel who from the Lord's tomb - in this case it is the Holy Table -brought the good tidings, that is to say, he announced the Lord's Resurrection to the Myrrh-bearing Women.

During the Gospel of the Orthros (Matins) the priest must be clothed in white in order to portray the Angel who was wearing a flashing forth white robe:"His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow".[2] (Therefore, this obligation to wear white garments, which was stressed as an order in the ancient codexes of the first centuries, is due to the Holy Scripture).

Still, why does the priest stand at the right of the Holy Table?

Mark the Evangelist gives us the answer. When the Myrrh-bearing Women entered the empty tomb, "they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted" (once again the white robe is mentioned).[3] Thus, the priest that reads the Gospel of the Orthros, like an angel, must stand at the right of the Holy Table.

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[1] Luk. 6,19 [2] Mat. 28,3 [3] Mark 16,5

Why does the priest stand in the middle of the Church Temple, for the Christians to venerate the Gospel book?

The answer is once again found in the Evangelists' accounts. In the Gospel the Christians worship the Lord, Who, after His Resurrection, "when the doors were shut",[1] came and stood in the midst of His Disciples, in the upper room of Holy Zion, and received their worship.

71. Once a monk was the one who received the guests in a certain Monastery of Mount Athos. (Archondaris, is the person who takes care of the guests, he prepares the rooms, offers coffee and a treat. It is a very tiring ministry, particularly on Mount Athos, where the pilgrims are very many, very many every day).

So, this monk was very tired from his ministry, which he had been carrying out for five consecutive years and he asked the Abbott to be replaced.

- Be patient, he replied, and you will also act hospitably towards Angels!

- With your blessing, the monk answered.

Sometime later, at night after the doors of the Monastery had been closed and as he was exhausted, he sat in the archondariki-guestroom for a while, opened the New Testament and started reading. He suddenly sees a most beautiful young man clothed in white coming in from the archondariki's door.

- Bless, my father, he tells him. Oh, what is it you are reading, the Evangelio (Gospel) of Heaven? You are blessed!

And before the guestmaster could respond, for he was stunned, the young man continued:

- Oh, I apologize for interrupting you, but I am very hungry.

Amazed the archondaris said very politely:

- Here you are, here you are, take a seat so that I may prepare something for you. What is your name?

- Michael, replied the young man.

So, quickly-quickly and very willingly, he started preparing the table, with zeal, for the young man, who came clothed in white, to eat. At that point he did not really understand, later he was impressed by the way he was dressed.

- While you are eating, he tells him, I will also prepare your cell and bring you some salad too.

As he was going to get the plate with the salad, he turned his head by instinct to look at that young man who had truly made an impression on him, again. That most beautiful young man had disappeared! Most certainly it was the Archangel Michael!

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[1] Jn 20,19

Since then his willingness for hospitality had grown bigger. He used to recall the incidence with emotion. This happened to Father Philaretos, the later Abbott of the Holy Monastery of Konstamonitou.[1]

If the Archangel blessed the book of God and its holy reading nevertheless, the devil is trying to break into our nous (mind) and with thoughts sprout weeds in order to destroy the spiritual wealth of the Gospel that the word of God accumulates in us.

Listening to the word of God inside the Church Temple leads us to the heavenly kingdom, according to **Saint John Chrysostom**. The Evangelist we are listening to is our guide to the city of Jerusalem Above. We enter the gate, which is opened by the Evangelist - when we listen to the Gospel reading - and we need to make a great deal of effort, for this city has a royal and resplendant character. So, let us open the gates wide, the doors of our intellect, let us open our hearing and with respect let us bow down before Christ the King... The Gospel reading is the Paradise where the source of the Holy Spirit flows. It is a source of myriads of rivers whose spring is not of water but of the gifts of the Holy Spirit themselves. This source is offered to every soul, without being lessened, without being spent. It is whole to everyone and to each one individually whole again".[2]

The whole Christ enters every soul. At times and for certain souls the letter of the Gospel, and moreover, of the Holy Bible, acquire an "essence" and become nourishment that enters within them and satisfies them, and at other times, once again they become light that illuminate their mind and broaden it in order to "capture" the divine thoughts. Then the thoughts take on another dimension... that is extended to eternity.

So many and myriads are the triune gifts of the Holy Spirit. That is why we persist that there is a value and a need not only to listen to the Gospel reading in a spirit of great devoutness, but also to meditate on the New Testament, the Psalter, and the Prophets and generally the Holy Bible at home.

Christ is the joyous tidings of the Sacred Gospel. Christ is "the Gospel of salvation". What can be made equal to the Gospel? **Saint John Chrysostom** poses the question. It is God on earth and man in heaven. Everything was joined together. The Angels were dancing with the people the people participated in the life of the Angels and that of the other heavenly Powers. And it was possible to see the many year long war pacified (that is to say, God's reconciliation with man), the devil put to shame, the demons fleeing, death being abolished, Paradise being opened, the curse vanishing, sin leaving from the face of the world, deception being persecuted, truth coming

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[1] Kotsonis Ioannikios, Hieromonk, *Bouquets from the Garden of the Mother of God*, ibid, p. 164-165

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 9,4749

back, the word of piety being spread everywhere and the life of heaven bearing fruit in abundance.[1]

The Gospel reading is the fountain of life and was easily given to us. We neither got tired nor sweated! And we will be asked to give an account for the fact that we were loved by God "unto death, even the death of the cross".[2]

The Christians should not come to the Divine Liturgy after the Gospel reading, according to an ancient Church Canon. There are certainly some practical obstacles, like long distances, small children, many times cold... However, let us make an effort and God will provide.

There are some, fortunately very few, who leave in the middle of the Divine Liturgy. They should be anathematized - according to the Canons of the Church, which are quite strict - "as if they are behaving in a disorderly way and as scorning the all-immaculate Mysteries".[3]

Therefore, let us not complain about not being able to understand anything. How can we, anyway with such disorder and disturbance that exist within us? Are we able to see with the darkness that reigns in our hearts? What obscures our mind and heart? Our passions, selfishness, pride, the fleshly train of thought, our unenlightened mind and lack of faith; even neglect, idleness, wrath, hardness, sensual pleasure, avarice, cruelty, malice and so many other things...

The Christians of the first centuries really loved studying the Holy Scripture! Whereas, today's priests who are Spiritual Fathers - Confessors, we would be more than happy if we managed to distract even a lukewarm promise from those who come to us confession that they will study four - five verses per day!... Woe to us, we Orthodox Christians should be ashamed for not studying the Holy Scripture, the minute the heretics literally know it by heart! Are we to gain our salvation in this way? Is this the way in which the devil will be vanquished? Will the passions be fought in this way? Of us who are asleep?

72. In 1960, when I was a deacon in the Holy Metropolis of Thessalonica I went to a religious bookstore in order to buy a book. There I met Father Leonidas, who used to be the preacher of that Holy Metropolis in particular. Two minutes had not gone by when a granny who was about 75 years of age entered. She said good morning, took Father Leonidas' blessing and asked for a Holy Bible.

Father Leonidas: "Mommy, do you know how to read?"

Granny: "Oh... no!!"

Father Leonidas: "Are you buying it as a gift for your children or for a grandchild of yours?"

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 12,429

[2] Phil. 2,8

[3] Alivizatos, Amilka, *The Holy Canons*, Canon E (V), Athens 1923, p.11

Granny: "No! No!"

Father Leonidas (intensely): "Well then, what are you going to do with it? For you do not know how to read. Are you going to put it on the iconstand.

Granny: "You see, Father I will take it in the morning and at night, I will be standing before the icon of Christ with the vigil-lamp lit, I will open it from the beginning and tell Christ: "My Little Christ, I do not know how to read, however, whatever is written here on this page may you put it first in my heart (and she pointed to the heart) and then in my mind (and she pointed to her head) and illuminate me so that I may say whatever you have written in here, first to my children and grandchildren and then to those who thirst for Your word".

We remained speechless for a while for we were astonished. Later, Father Leonidas blessed that holy person and offered her a big book of the New Testament.[1]

Personally, I learned my lesson. And I believe that that holy person will judge many of us priests and laymen - modern Greek Orthodox Christians- for the great negligence and indifference which we show in studying the Holy Scripture, for we disobey God's commandment which tells us: "in His law will he meditate day and night",[2] "Search the Scriptures; they are they which testify of me".[3]

Therefore, the Gospel leads us to the harmony of the works that are based on keeping the commandments, the basic theoretical knowledge about the trinitarianness of our Holy God, the Godmanliness of Jesus Christ and generally, the work of the incarnate Dispensation, because in it we find the exhortations for the cultivation of virtues, for keeping the commandments and respecting the Dogmas of our faith.

Saint John of Damascus compares the Holy Bible to paradise, that is to a garden that has a door, and says: "Let us knock on the door of this most beautiful, most fragrant, most sweet, most graceful paradise of the Holy Scriptures, which touches our heart and when it is sorrowful, consoles it then again when the heart is upset the Holy Scripture relieves it, it elevates it". And he wonders: " May the Holy Bible with its meditation, elevates our mind and places it on the back of the Divine dove in order to carry us with its silver wings to the Son and Word of God, Who reigns in the Kingdom of Heaven, to the Heir of the Planter of the noetic vineyard!..."And the Saint continues: "However, let us not knock on the door of the Holy Bible with indifference, as if we are on the sideline, as if we are doing something boring, but with more patience and persistence and let us not get discouraged. For only in this way will the portal of the Kingdom of God be opened for

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[1] Personal notes [2] Psalm. 1,2 [3] Jn 5,39

us. When we read the Gospel and do not understand the text, we should not be discouraged, but continue our reading, and at some other point God may enlighten us and give us the answer. Let us ask the Fathers in the books, who interpret the Holy Scriptures, the Church and the Spiritual Fathers, for the word of God exhorts: "ask your father to teach you and he will proclaim the truth".[1]

Saint John Chrysostom says the following: "Christ very successfully called the Holy Scriptures a door for: it leads us by the hand and takes us close to God, it formulates our character and makes us meek like the sheep, protects us from various adversaries.

The door of this Holy Scriptures is safe; it blocks the entrance to the heretics and to those who are deluded and thus keeps us safe. It provides us with the right teaching and does not allow us to live in a spirit of deceit and dishonesty.

The examples of the Righteous, who endured so many trials yet managed to overcome them, are not few in the Holy Scripture. Also, the stories of the Saints with their multifarious martyrdoms grant us the same strength and reinforce the same faith. The Holy Martyrs first imitated Christ's sufferings and later on those of the Righteous and Venerable men of our faith.

That is why Paul used this method in order to console certain Christians. And when he wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, he would present the Prophet Daniel, the three Youths, the Prophet Elijah, the Prophet Elisha, and many others as examples of patience, perseverance, and faith... And the Saint of golden speech concludes: "For one to become a partaker of the sufferings of tortures that were suffered by others, even if only through recollection and remembrance, ensures consolation to those who are in sorrow and distress. Hence, in order for us not to be discouraged and give up when we come across trials and tribulations that abuse us, let us all turn to the examples of the Holy Scriptures, the examples of the Saints and the Righteous and especially that of Job, who at one point heard: "all of your ten children are dead!" And he replied: "Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forever more".[2] It is a response that our Church chants triumphantly every time there is a Divine Liturgy. From the source of the divine word the mind is illuminated, the will is strengthened, the faith is made firm and decisions are made anew".[3]

What was expressed by the Sacred Chrysostom and Saint John of Damascus shows that the Holy Bible needs to be read and meditated upon systematically, regularly, and persistently. It is not enough to flick through the pages and read it superficially, quickly and off-hand. We should not play with the book of God, nor should we take it lightly and ignore it. It is not a

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[1] Saint John of Damascus, *Exact Publication*..., ibid, p.397

[2] Job 1,21

[3] Saint John Chrysostom,GCF 9, p.75-77

newspaper, nor a magazine; it is not television, nor radio! It needs to be chewed, and assimilated into our souls. It needs to be processed and applied.

The beneficial influence and omnipotence of the divine word can be seen in the following incidence:

73. When I was a deacon in Panagia Phaneromeni in Nea Michaniona in Thessalonica, the priest of the Church Temple then, Father Basil, when asked to read exorcisms to a woman who had an unclean spirit, she was demon possessed that is, tied with ropes and four men could not restrain her, he answered:

- She is in need of the Four Gospels, therefore you will stay here for four days; I will be reading on top of her a whole Gospel everyday.

While the Gospel was being read the spirit would shiver violently and the relatives with great difficulty would try to keep her under the petrachilion (stole). After the priest finished reading the fourth Gospel, he read the Dismissal prayers and said "Through the prayers..." and with his right hand struck the woman's head gently. He lifted the stole and the spirit had left. The woman was "clothed and in her right mind".

It is a miracle of our Lord, similar to those that are described by the Evangelists.[1]

In the Divine Liturgy's natural course following the holy Readings - the epistle and the gospel- the **Preaching** of the divine word and **"The Ektenia of Fervent Supplication"** follow.

This is how it used to be done in the past and until recent years. Sometimes it is also done today. This is the preaching's regular place and not during the Koinonikon. Of course, the preaching was shifted for purely practical reasons, since Christians, unfortunately, come to Church late.

The preaching of the divine word has always been connected to the prayer and worship of our Church. The Lord Himself preached in the synagogues "on the Sabbath day"[2] and it was then when he performed miracles.

- The great Apostle of the Nations, Paul, feels a heavy responsibility when he does not preach: "...O woe unto me if I do not evangelize".[3] And as he writes to his student Apostle Timothy he commands: "preach the word".[4]
- The philosopher and Martyr of our Church **Saint Justin**, in 100 A.D. approximately, is the first one to witness that after the reading of the Holy Scriptures the preaching of the word would start.[5]

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Mark 3,2 [3] I Cor. 9,16 [4] II Tim. 4,2

[5] Saint Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, P.G. 6,429B

According to the poor and scant study that I have been doing up to this day, I have noticed that the preaching should be one of repentance. When following His Resurrection Jesus Christ sent His Disciples to all the nations, He didn't merely tell them to preach, but also what to preach: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations".[1] And the Apostle Paul preached "repent and turn to God".[2] Therefore, the preaching of the Church, the Gospel of Christ, is repentance and the return of people to God.

Repentance is related to the great privilege and endowment that is recommended by the Gospel and is granted by the Church: the remission of sins! No matter what the times and needs which pressure nations and their people, are particularly Christian people I think and personally believe that the preaching of the Church must be a preaching of repentance and return of all people to God's will.

Certainly, we the priests are going to cauterize evil, to criticize, reproach, we are going to make strict comments to those who are breaking the law, but we are also going to admonish, catechize, give fatherly advice, comfort, and are always going to invite people to repent. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith God. Speak, ye priests to the heart of Jerusalem; comfort her".[3]

The Church, according to Apostle Paul, was not ordered to preach philosophical theories and social ideologies, but received "grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith".[4] He went out to the world to preach repentance and return with obedience to the will of God, and not for people to start discussing, quarreling, fighting, and killing each other. Not for them to split, as it has been happening for two thousand years now with the heresies and delusions, but in order for them to obey the Sacred Canons and the decisions of the seven Ecumenical Synods, so that everyone would repent and believe.

With the Prayer that is read prior to the Gospel reading, we ask God to illuminate us so we could preach: **"To the understanding of thy Gospel teachings"**. This phrase refers to the preaching of the divine word, for the preaching, as far as its interpretation is concerned, is the continuation and extension of the Holy Bible. This means that God must illuminate us both when we meditate the word of God at home and when the priests are preaching it and the Christian people are listening.

74. Saint John the Merciful (555-619 A.D.) was the Archbishop of Alexandria during the last decade of his life.

So, at that time certain Christians who were not devout were in the bad habit of stepping out of the Church during preaching, immediate-

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[1] Luk 24,47 [2] Acts 26,20

[3] Is. 40, 1-2 [4] Rom. 1, 5

ly after the reading of the Gospel, in the Divine Liturgy, in order to start chatting! They would once again re-enter the Church during the Cherubic Hymn. Since this situation remained irredeemable, Saint John, at one point stepped out, clothed in his hierarchical vestments, and sat with them! As soon as they saw him, they were astonished.

Then the Saint tells them:

- Don't be surprised. The shepherd should be where the sheep are. We will either all enter the Church or I will also stay with you outside. And I will preach the word of God out here!

In this way he managed to rectify this bad habit.[1]

With all that has been said about Divine Worship and preaching, we reach the **conclusion** that the Church is two things: Ministering the divine word and performing the Liturgy of the divine Mysteries. That is to say, the Ambo and the Holy Table.

"Everything that we preach from the ambo and we shout in the Church Temple, which is "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth",[2] everything that is said, the way in which it is said and those who say it (whoever that may be), in the synaxis of the Church going Christians, is unfortunately not always the interpretation of the God-inspired Scriptures, is not the word of repentance and return of transgressors. The preaching in Divine Worship should be both as far as its content and expression is concerned, corresponding to the Divine Worship, the faith, and the prayer of the Church".[3]

75. Once on a Sunday Saint Spyridon was performing the Divine Liturgy by himself. The whole congregation was chanting. Following the Gospel reading an infinite number of angelic voices started chanting. Everyone was stupefied for they were astonished; they were so much in awe and terror that they remained silent. And when Saint Spyridon said to the people "peace be to all", Angels and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, Thrones, Principalities, Authorities, Powers, all the celestial Powers answered in one voice replied: "And to thy spirit"! Thus, the faithful Christian congregation during that unforgettable Sunday experienced the heavenly Worship of the Triumphant Church uniting with the Militant Church on earth. The one Church with the One Shepherd, Christ.[4]

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[1] Laghis Matthew, *The Great Synaxarion*..., vol. 11, Athens 1984[5], p.381

[2] Tim. 3,15

[3] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozanis, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification*..., ibid, p.224

[4] Saint Nikodemus the Aghiorite, *Synaxarion*, vol. A, K. CH. Spanos, Athens, p.294

8. THE EKTENIA OF FERVENT SUPPLICATION

After the Gospel reading and preaching,**"The Ektenia of Fervent Supplication"** which is a persistent and warm supplication towards God for all the faithful, the living and the reposed, and includes a total of six petitions, immediately follows. It starts off with the exhortation:

"LET US ALL SAY WITH OUR WHOLE SOUL AND WITH OUR WHOLE MIND, LET US SAY".

Like Jesus Christ during the night in the garden of Gethsemane, before He was arrested, "being in an agony he prayed more earnestly"[1] and in fact in such a way that His sweat was falling on the earth and in the roots of the trees like drops of blood..., hence, we should also pray in the same way; with fervor and in faith, "with our whole soul and with our whole mind", according to the Evangelical divine word.

Are we attending the Divine Liturgy? We should only think of Christ, nothing else except Christ and that which He prescribes. Thus, we perform that which is vividly exhorted by the priest at the beginning of the Ektenia: "Let us all say with our whole soul and with our whole mind, let us say". However, how many of us, who go to Church, perform this exhortation of the Church? Unfortunately, we may be physically present but spiritually absent and with the nerves of the soul "at sleep", lethargic.

76. Once the Venerable Father Nicholas Planas was censing during the ninth ode when the chanters were chanting "more Honorable than the Cherubim and more Glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim".

He walked by a lady who was standing in the adjoining pews and did not cense her. He did not cense her at all, he just walked by her. There was a pew in a row of pews that was empty. He stood there, censed it five to six times and left.

When the Divine Liturgy was over, this woman went to him and told him:

- Father Nicholas, during the ninth ode you did not cense me but you went and censed an empty pew.

- That figures, Mrs. Georgia, he told her, you were not there! Nevertheless, the empty pew belongs to Mrs. Maria who is ill. She was ill

at home but was present in heart and spirit. You, on the other hand, were here in body but in spirit you were with the goats![1]

The Ektenia of Fervent Supplication **"let us all say..."** concerns the faithful who are in the House of God but also the clergy of all ranks.

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas mentions accordingly: The Ektenia is a prayer for the faithful who obey the commandments of the Gospel and are imitators of Christ's philanthropy. These are the shepherds of the Church, for if they are consistent with their obligations, follow and teach that which is written in the Gospel, guide Christ's flock well, they are worth being prayed for in common prayer.[2]

The Ektenia of Fervent Supplication continues with such petitions that we have already analyzed as:

- "for the devout Orthodox Christians...,
- "for our Archbishop...",
- "for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation..."

The people through the chanters reply with a triple "Lord, Have Mercy".

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas also points out that "asking God for mercy means asking Him for His Kingdom, which Christ had promised to grant those who ask for it and that He will add everything else that we are in need of. That is why the faithful are contented with this supplication for it can be applied to everything".[3]

The next petition of the Ektenia of Fervent Supplication is

«FOR OUR BRETHREN: THE PRIESTS, HIEROMONKS, DEACONS, HIERODEACONS AND MONASTICS AND ALL OUR BROTHERHOOD IN CHRIST».

Which is the Brotherhood in Christ for which we are praying? There are two answers.

- The **first** one considers the whole body of shepherds (patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, presbyters, deacons) and all the monks.
- The **second** will be analyzed extensively: When the God-Man Lord, Jesus Christ came to the world He embraced the person who was humble

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[1] Martha Nun, *The Holy Father Nicholas Planas*, ibid, p. 61-62

[2] Saint Nicholas Kavasilas, *Interpretation of the Divine Liturgy*, Thessalonica 1991[2], p.82

[3] Ibid, P.G. 150,396

and who had received contempt and called him "His brother". The one who obeys the will of our Holy God is also Jesus Christ's brother. He Himself assures it: "for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister..."[1]

Brother according to the Greek language is the one who is born of the same mother. Other brothers, according to the preaching of the Gospel, in a spiritual sense, are those who are born of the Mother-Church. She is the spiritual Mother of the faithful. The holy Baptismal Font is the Mother's womb. And as the children, who come from the same womb, are called siblings, likewise those who are baptized and come out of the Orthodox baptismal font, which is the same for everyone, are called brothers. Hence, in every Orthodox holy Church Temple Christians should not be strangers with each other. We are all brothers in Christ Jesus.

We should know each other, become brothers, and there should be a strong bond between us. One should be closer to the other. We should all give the greeting of love, the words "good morning" of God, the smile, Christ's embrace. Not hypocritically, not in a deceiving way, but with fervor, warmth, with all our heart. "With our whole soul and with our whole heart". We are "members in particular",[2] members of Christ, thus brothers.

Discrimination ceases to exist once you are inside the Church Temple. Rich, poor, tycoons, generals, members of parliament, university professors, pupils, students, farmers, literate, illiterate, industrialists, workers... all -but all- are equal inside the Church Temple! Equal before God, children of God, brothers! Secular discriminations take place outside the Church, inside the Church Temple they do not exist, and they should not exist.

Christians have a brotherly relationship, and as brothers sit at a common table where all of them eat together, after they have prayed, similarly, inside the same Church Temple, everyone sits and as we are gathered around the same Table, with the Angels and Archangels, with the Cherubim, and the Seraphim, with the Prophets and the Righteous, with the Apostles and the Saints... all together at the same Table, we eat of the same Body and drink of the same Blood! That is why, according to the Fathers we are "of the same blood with Christ", we all have the same Blood in our veins.

Our brotherhood should not only be limited to inside the Church Temple, but it should also extend socially outwardly. There should be no self-interest, no ulterior motive. We should be brothers inside the Church Temple, brothers outside the Church Temple. This was established in the Church during the first Christian years, as it is testified in the book of Acts of the Apostles, where everything was common. "And the multitude of them that believed was of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common".[3]

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[1] Mat. 12,50 [2] I Cor. 12,27 [3] Acts 4,32

The word "brotherhood" was used and was exploited by many, groups of people, nations, even revolutions like the French, whose slogan was the three - faceted: brotherhood - equality - freedom (fraternite´- galite´- liberte´). A nice but unfeasible chant for it is without Christ! For whoever did not belong to this "brotherhood", was beheaded in the guillotine.

The French were unsuccessful with this term, not because it was not God's will but because it was not the will of the people. Nowadays, the same thing happens. It is suggested by Christ's teaching and His Church for the peaceful co-existence of people, for harmony and love amongst them, every day, every time there is a Divine Liturgy. However, it is not realized, not because God does not want to, not because God cannot - since God is the One Who suggests it furthermore - but because man does not want it. For I do not want it, for you do not want it, for the other does not want it! Even though we are called Christians!

There is a need for **"brotherhood in Christ"**, but **"in Christ"**!!! Because no human social system has succeeded to this day. It has been proved by the collapse of existential socialism. We would in fact say that this constituted a utopia. However, Christian life is based on something different: Where three or four believe and consider the Gospel and the Divine Worship as their rule of life, in this small group there is the image of communion in Christ, **"of brotherhood in Christ"**. And if this can be done by few, it can also be done by many, yet only through Jesus Christ.

All of us who are church-goers, who go for confession, who partake of the immaculate Mysteries, who have:

- one faith,
- one Baptism,
- one Eucharist,
- one Dogma
- one common Divine Worship…
- who have a common struggle... before it is too late, we ought to warm up and arouse our faith, in order to find ourselves closer to the All-holy Mysteries, to fill up the Churches but our hearts also with Christ and confess Him everywhere and all the time, crying: "I believe in Christ!" Christ Himself said: "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do".[1] Do not be afraid, He says, of the ones who will kill your bodies or who will cut your hands, or who will extract your teeth or your eyes, but be afraid of those who will have the power to uproot your faith from within your hearts Difficult times are about to come: The evil powers will try "insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect".[2] May God protect us and illuminate us.

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[1] Mat. 24,24

[2] Luk. 12,4

Nevertheless, when there is no harmony, love and peace at home, in our family, when in our relationships we lack forbearance, love, patience, how are we to set up a brotherly communion in Christ Jesus? How? That is why, we pray "with all our heart and with all our soul" in the Ektenia of Fervent Supplication **"for...all our brotherhood in Christ"**.

The following petition is said for the reposed.

"AGAIN WE PRAY FOR THE BLESSED AND EVER-MEMORABLE FOUNDERS OF THIS HOLY CHURCH, AND ALL OUR FATHERS AND BRETHREN, THE ORTHODOX DEPARTED THIS LIFE BEFORE US, WHO HERE AND IN ALL THE WORLD LIE ASLEEP IN THE LORD".

With this supplication the priest exhorts all of us, clergy and laity, to pray first for the founders of the holy Church Temple and then for all those who reposed (are dead) in piety. It is a supplication for the dead; a supplication that is also repeated during the end of the Divine Liturgy, when on the Holy and fearsome Table there is the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

We remember the departed especially in the Holy Prothesis where we say the words "Lord God remember in his kingdom the servants who have fallen asleep..."and we read the names of the reposed which the faithful bring to us in writing.

Two true events testify that the souls of the departed benefit greatly when they are commemorated during the Divine Liturgy.

77. During his visit to the Most Holy Tomb of Christ in Jerusalem a writer met a monk from the Holy Tomb. As this monk was referring to his parents he mentioned the following:

"My father was a poor but very pious man. When there was a Liturgy he used to wait for the priest at the entrance of the Church. Even though my mother was not impious she seldom went to Church. On Sundays, instead of going to Church, she preferred to stay home in order to cook for the family and do the housework.

When both my parents departed, says the monk, I dreamt of both of them; on the one hand, my father was in a very beautiful and very joyful garden where he was enjoying the happiness of Paradise, on the

other, my mother in great distress was telling me: "My child, give me also something to eat from your plate! I'm hungry!"

When I woke up the following day I thought: Since my mother is dead, what kind of food might she wish to eat? Of course, she is in need of spiritual nourishment.

Without any hesitation I went to the Holy Monastery of Saint Savvas and gave whatever was necessary, asking them serve do a Forty-Day Liturgy in my mother's name so that God may elevate her a little bit in order for her to be with my father and thus experience the joy in the beauty of Paradise together.

However, before the Forty-Day Liturgy ended, about half-way, I dreamt of my father who in a sullen tone was telling me:

- Why did you take away part of my portion?

I assure you, said the monk, that I was stupefied! I did not know what to answer!

The following day I asked that my father's name be immediately added to the Forty-Day Liturgy and when it ended I also did a second one for both my parents. Later on, I dreamt of both of them once again. This time they were at peace and happy, they were not complaining anymore.

Since then many years went by, more than twenty. I constantly do Memorial Services for the repose of their souls and every year a Forty-Day Liturgy is performed in order for them to have more comfort in the Lord ".[1]

78. Many years ago a young priest told me the following fearsome accoun: "My mother who did not want her son to become a priest died three years after my ordination. When she died, I, her son, as a priest, did not pay any attention. I did all that was necessary nothing more.

One evening, towards dusk, I was passing right outside the Cemetery. So, I thought: "Why not go and light the vigil-lamp?" In fact, I lit it and sat on a rock. However, I had not taken the stole with me and therefore did not read the Trisagion Service for the repose of her soul.

I felt as if I were a little dizzy and suddenly I thought all the tombs started opening up, dead bodies of people were getting up and crying!..

- HELP! HELP, Priests of the Most High, help..., Orthodox Christians, help! Liturgies, prayers, Memorial Services, the Trisaghion Service... HEEEELPPP, Christians!!!

A little while later, terrified as I was, I see my mother:

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[1] Personal notes

- HELP, my son, she told me, help! Help, now that you are a priest, help for everyone, help, help!!!...

And she fell on top of me as she was writhing and crying desperately, asking for help for her soul.

Then I came round but I was terrified... It was already nightfall... I left in a rush... my frocks (rasa) were also torn... and as I was terrified I was not able to sleep all night.

The following day I told my presbytera (a priest's wife):

- Listen, I will be performing the Liturgy for three consecutive years on a daily basis, even during the Forty-Day Lent, for my mother, for all the departed, for all those whose names are written in the Cemetery, as well as for all the names of the departed that I will be given from now on".

I performed one thousand one hundred consecutive Liturgies, incessantly! One thousand one hundred Memorial Services with boiled wheat, Trisaghion, services along with what was necessary, every day!

Many times at night I dreamt of the souls "thanking" me, some of them because their thirst was quenched, others because they were cooled, others again because they were satisfied, others for they were warm in the cold! "Thank you, my father, I am warm now", they would tell me, "I was cold; I am warm, thank you". Others were thanking me for they had seen a little bit of light while others were holding little breads in their hands..."[1]

Imagine... The souls are crying for **HELP**! My mother, my father, your mother, your dad, your brother, your grandmother, your grandfather..., are crying for **HELP**! What are we all doing for them? Going to Church sometimes helps us remember our dear ones, who have fallen as leep.

"For all our fathers and brethren gone to their rest before us..."

There is body, there is also soul. There is life, there is also death. There is physical death and spiritual death. The body we have now, conceals a terrible germ, the germ of decay and death. Death is the result of the fall of the first man, of Adam and Eve. The body after death, after it has been separated from the soul goes through decay, however it is not destroyed. "You are earth and to earth shall you return". It is dissolved into the elements of which it is composed. And as these elements are scattered in nature, a day will come when once again by command of the Omnipotent God all these elements will unite and will make up the new bodies, incorrupt, spiritual and impervious to death. They will be bodies that will greatly differ from the current ones, angelic bodies. God's plan for the resurrection of the dead bodies is mighty.

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[1] Personal notes

Once Saint Augustine narrated the following:

79. During his time there lived a doctor called Yenadios. Yenadios was materialistic. He neither believed in God nor in the soul or in immortality or in hell, neither in Paradise nor in Angels, nor in devils. He did not believe in anything and like many of us today was proud of it.

One night while Yenadios was sleeping he had a dream. A young man appeared beside his bed. It seemed to him that he had woken him up and said:

- Follow me.

Yenadios willingly got up and followed him. They walked together for a long time; they went to nice places and reached an extremely beautiful city where they would hear an amazing kind of music with heavenly melodies by myriads of Angels. After a while he woke up in peace. He truly liked this adventure. Materialistic as he was he did not pay any attention to it and said:

- What a pity, it was only a dream, come and gone. And forgot about it.

After a long time he dreamt of the same young man sitting next to him and asking him:

- Yenadios, do you know me?

- Of course, he says, I remember you well, very well.

- What do you remember?

- I remember you coming and taking me to a city of unutterable beauty. There we listened to magnificent melodies. How nice it was!

- How did you see, asked the young man, this city, how did you listen to that beautiful melody? Were you awake or in a dream?

- In a dream.

- Where was your body?

- In bed.

- Were your eyes open or closed?

- Closed!

- However, were you able to see me?

- I could see you!

- Were you able to listen to me?

- I could listen to you!

- How then were you able to see me? With which eyes and ears would you listen to me and that melody?

The doctor did not know what to say. Then that brilliantly arrayed young man told him:

- You see?! Even though your eyes are closed your senses inactive and your body inert and still from sleep, you live and act and have pleasant adventures. You have a life that is not dependant on the body. The same occurs with death. You will see with different eyes, you will

hear with different ears and you will live without the body. Stop doubting, that there isn't such a thing as life after death!

Yenadios woke up abruptly and wanted to say "it was only a dream", but stopped and wondered: "Was it a dream? Was it reality? Whose teaching? Whose? Was it God's?" He could not give a definite answer. He was a materialist!

Nevertheless, since then he gradually started believing. The same Yenadios, later on as a Christian, narrated this adventure of his to Saint Augustine and the Saint wrote it in one of his books.[1]

How can life be understood? How can life be felt? By living it! When we are alive we already live! Eternal life is life! Therefore, it is felt, understood, conceived. We live an eternal life when we foretaste immortality and eternity during this life. And we live eternity especially during Divine Worship. "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life".[2] We do not experience eternity on our own, but together with all the faithful Christians -living and reposed- as members of the Body of the Church of Christ.

Saint Gregory the Dialogue writes about a Christian called Servulus who lived during the years 550 and 600 A.D.

80. Servulus was extremely poor. He lived in deprivation and extremely difficult circumstances inside an arcade. He was totally paralyzed after a long-term illness; he could move neither hands nor feet. His physical condition, as you well understand, was tragic.

However, he received a lot of support from the Christians of his time: they would not cease to bathe him, wash away his wounds and feces, feed him, change him, take care of him, and generally provide for him in many ways.

Despite his tragic situation Servulus had plenty of virtues as he was patient and did not express any complaint; he would also glorify God, give his thanksgiving towards the Christians for whatever it was they offered (even for the least help he would always express his gratitude), his forbearance, his love and kindness, his spiritual courage and he was especially rich in the word of God.

Why? For he constantly asked the Christians to read to him from the manuscripts of the time the Holy Scriptures and also tell him all about the martyrdoms of the first Christians. Hence, in turn, he used to tell his visitors and the ones who took care of him, encouraging words, words that would reinforce, words of consolation, saving words for the sool. As a result, everyone left feeling that they had benefited...

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[1] Bakogiannis, Vassilios, Archmandrite, *After Death*, Tinos 3 publications, p.12-13

[2] Jn. 6, 54

Servulus prayed a lot and frequently partook of the Immaculate Mysteries..

The time had finally come for him to be rewarded for his patience of Job during his serious illness, his physical lesions, his pain, the bad smell that his body and wounds gave off, his sorrow, poverty... First of all, all the pain stopped and his whole body had become lighter. He realized that his time had come to depart from this world... He asked all those who were present to kneel and chant hymns to praise God, as he was waiting for his soul to exit his tormented body. Suddenly, his poor hut was filled with heavenly hymns...Everyone stood still... He then raised his paralyzed hands, made the sign of the Cross and placed his hands on his chest in crosswise! while simultaneously his soul was being freed from his body.

With the soul's exodus, the place was filled with a strange and most sweet savor. Servulus' countenance was as bright as light.

A monk who witnessed all the events, later on told Saint Gregory with tears in his eyes and filled with emotion that until the day of the burial of that blessed christian's body, the inconceivable and heavenly savor had not left...[1]

This one testimony from the writings of the Saints witnesses that during the soul's exodus, which is dying as it is prepared and being in a state of repentance, is received by heavenly angelic Powers and with a clear indication that the sweet savor of the All-Holy Spirit is present.

THE MIDDLE STATE AND PARTIAL JUDGEMENT OF THE SOULS

- **What happens to the soul from the moment it departs until the resurrection of the dead?**
- **Where is it located?**
- **During its exodus, what does it perceive? What does it go through?**

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[1] Laghis Matthew, *Evergetinos*, vol. 1, case Z, Athens 1990[6], p. 102

In his confession the **Patriarch of Jerusalem Dositheos** mentions the following on the same topic: "Those among the Christians who even committed deadly sins but did not die in despair, although they REPENTED however they did not have the time to confess their transgressions and thus they did not bear the fruit of repentance, their souls went to Hades and are enduring their sentence for the sins they committed, in the sense that they are in a state of foretasting but also with hope. They sense, of course, that they will be delivered from there, they will be set free, due to God's extreme goodness, through the Divine Liturgy as well as the charity offered by their relatives.

We must also understand that we do not know the time when they will actually be relieved. The fact that they are somewhat relieved of their sufferings, somewhat comforted, somewhat refreshed even prior to the general resurrection and judgment, that we know and believe. Yet, we do not know when it happens".[1]

These words of Saint Dositheos of Jerusalem are very comforting for the souls who wanted to repent, but didn't manage to fulfill their repentance in deed. For many ask "what will happen with these souls?"

And now let us refer to the **JUDGMENT OF THE SOULS.**

Many Fathers dealt with what happens to the souls when they are separated from the body.

We know that every Christian has his own Guardian Angel who protects him, guides him to what is good, awakens his conscience, fights the devil and the evil spirits because they want to tear the soul which he is guarding to shreds. It is therefore only natural for our Angel to have rights and take initiative in order to protect us äèñéíã the time of our death! In fact, every night we supplicate him in the Small Compline with the Prayer to our Guardian Angel: **"O Holy Angel who accompanieth my wretched soul and lowly life, forsake me not, and depart not from me because of my extravagance and wickedness. Give not access to the evil demon to rule with his might this mortal body of mine..."**. That is to say, do not allow the devil, the evil demon to consume me, to seize me, to subdue me during the time of my death. Hence, the Guardian Angel of our souls in the one who shields, helps and protects us every day and whom we sadden with our transgressions...

What about the demons? The demons mortally hate the soul of the Orthodox faithful Christian and thus try, with their million cunning ways, to estrange the soul from the will of the Triune God and His Evangelical word. Thus, during the time of death they lurk like crows, in order to swoop down on the souls and especially on those whom they consider their own, that is

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[1] Saint Dositheos of Jerusalem, *A Confession of the Orthodox Faith*, Thessalonica 1983, p.95

to say those who during their earthly life agreed with their exhortations either to pleasure and lust, either to malice and craftiness, either to pride and vanity, either to greed and avarice, either to hardness and ungratefulness, either to abstention from the Mysteries as well as the postponement of the Holy Confession, either due to disbelief, atheism, cowardice and fighting God. According to the Fathers it is natural for this intervention of Angels and demons to occur.

Every soul, depending on its spiritual state, the darkened or lighted one, bears a special mark: The Fathers say that God-loving and virtuous souls who until their last breath bore the fruits of repentance, have the bright anointing of the Triune God and the mark of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, the souls who are unrepentant, harsh, vicious and irreverent bear the devil's dark stigma and the mark of the Antichrist from now! So analogous to the mark which the souls have, they are claimed respectively either by Angels or by demons.

Therefore, according to the Orthodox Tradition -which is based on the views of the Fathers, the experience of the Saints and especially on the monks' great experience- at the time of death a judgment of the souls takes place by the evil spirits, in other words, a kind of check pointing by the evil spirits called **"telonia"**, and thus are trying to find moral transgressions and sins so that they can have the soul in their possession.

An extremely violent struggle takes place among good and evil spirits to claim the departing soul. The soul who is sinful and unrepentant is under the dominion of the filthy spirits, which with their characteristic raging mania even try and claim the righteous and virtuous souls. They did not even hesitate to approach the Lord when He went on the Mountain where He remained for forty days, without, of course, finding a flaw which in turn would support their dark demands. Just think of what authority they had! They would dare to act in a certain way for they had the authority to do so! They took Jesus Christ Who was God-Man, perfect God and perfect man, and "set Him on the pinnacle of the temple", and from there, at the peak of a mountain, in order to show Him the beauty of the whole world: "Look, all these things [we] will give You if You will fall down and worship [us]"! However, their goal was not accomplished. "...for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me",[1] the Lord Himself assures.

The **Holy Chrysostom** characterizes these evil spirits as "threat bearing angels", that is to say, angels that are threatening our souls, as well as "abrupt powers".[2]

Saint Cyril of Alexandria describes the "check pointing" of the souls by the evil spirits in a very graphic way: The moment the soul is separated

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[1] Jn. 14,30

[2] Vassiliadis N., The Mystery of death, Athens 1983, p.371

from the body, it sees the "horrible and wild and ruthless and unruly demons, as dark ethiopians (with black countenance) present". And if the soul is righteous, it is taken by the Holy Angels. Nevertheless, while it is ascending through the air up high, Saint Cyril goes on in his description, its ascent is being impeded by the check pointing, the evil spirits, each of which "offers the [souls'] personal transgressions". In other words, the passions that are the result of the senses, of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, and also any other transgression, for which the soul may be found guilty, with the intention to impede its ascent to the Lord's throne and be held by the evil powers. Yet, at the same time the good Angels offer and indicate the souls' good deeds.

In case the soul is proved to be righteous, it is led by the Angels to the unutterable joy of heaven, in the "Middle" -naturally- state of the souls, in the foretaste that is to say of the Kingdom of Heaven. If however, the soul is proved to be sinful and unrepentant, having lived "in negligence and debauchery", then it will hear that fearful voice: "let the ungodly be taken away, that he see not the glory of the Lord".[1] Woe to him! for he will definitely be taken by the demons."Let the ungodly one be taken away"! ...[2]

84. But Father Demetrios Gagastathis' grandmother, as he himself narrated us, must not have passed through the check pointing, since "she was a sacristan who served voluntarily and whole-heartedly for a whole lifetime. She had foreseen her death three days prior to it. On the last day she prepared herself and said:

- Can't you see the ladder which they are preparing for me for the heavens?" She lifted her clothes a little bit, made the sign of the Cross, and afterwards it was as if she grabbed onto the ladder in order to climb it, and she fell asleep..."[3]

I believe that she heard the voice of the Holy Archangels calling her to Paradise. I pray that we all hear this voice and not the voice that condemns to eternal hell.

I have a personal, bitter and didactic experience at the "Metaxas Diagnostic Hospital", in Piraeus, during the decade 1970-80 with many people who were dying. I found certain instances, written in notes that I had kept and to which I am referring.

85. One morning I went to commune a certain patient, whose name was well-known, a man of wordly authority, power and an abundance of wealth after his relatives had requested it. He was at the hospital's

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[1] Is. 26,10

[2] Vassiliadis N., *The Mystery of death*, ibid, p.375

[3] *Father Demetris Ghaghastathis, life, miracles...*,Orthodox Kypseli publications, ibid, p.185

last floor, in a luxurious room with a single bed. I asked his loved ones to leave us alone to see if I could make him confess, perhaps even a last minute small confession, as much as he could under the circumstances.

So, when I made the first question "have you done this, perhaps?" he did not respond, but, terrified, he began shouting at me to make the black demons leave the room. He started trembling... he became yellowish... blackish... his eyes were open wide for he was in terror, he grabbed me by my cassock and started pulling me. (Fortunately, the Holy Communion was covered.)

- I do not want that which you have brought me, he says. Take it away, take it away. Save me, save me, help... help...

He started tossing and turning in bed. Terror, fear..., there was a general sense of panic. He hid his face, he was probably scared; who knows what he was witnessing!

I was in constant prayer. A horrible thing indeed! I was trying to calm him down but in vain. And while he was pulling me by the cassock, he started asking for an extension of life. This was even more tragic.

- Let me live for one more day, one more hour, one hour...

I wanted to confess him, to commune him so that his soul would be saved, still he was asking for extra time to live. Why? Why was he asking for a one hour extension?

- So I can have a fill of life. Help me, father, one hour it is I want, one hour of life, one hour, so I can have a fill of it, have a fill of it...

And he would squeeze his hands and shout:

- One hour, one hour...

Horrifying, what can I tell you?!

His relatives rushed in the room when they heard him shouting. The doctors rushed in too. I withdrew, sat in a corner and prayed as much as I could.

He continued shouting constantly... Gradually, gradually, gradually, his voice would lessen, lessen...

- ... Help... help... help... one hour, so I can have a fill of it, have a fill of it... go away you black...

Unfortunately, I could not commune him the state he was in, for he was moving his head right-left, shaking his arms and legs, his whole body was shivering.

After a while the death rattle began and showing contempt for the Holy Communion and saying "take it away from here", he died!... The extension was not given.[1]

You see, he did not ask for a one-hour extension to repent but to have a fill of life... And he said "take these away from here". Had he asked for

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[1] Personal notes

it for repentance, I believe and I am sure that God Who loves man would have given it to him (this one more day he was asking for) but, for repentance. For him to say the eight-word sentence: "God, forgive me for I am a sinner". What he should have said in order to partake of the Immaculate Mysteries and depart for heaven.

I also believe that what happened was for me especially and for all of us a powerful sermon of repentance. All of us, however, as Christians should learn, be taught and at last be afraid and thus reform ourselves before it's too late. Not learn after death! We do not learn then! "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation".[1]

Repentance is cultivated from now and every day and every moment. It should be equated with our breath. If we keep postponing and are lukewarm then at the time and moment of death, we might not be able to repent. For, there is also sudden death. It is not at all unlikely that during that time we will not have either the will on the mood to repent. We might consider ourselves as righteous and holy.

86. There was once a woman who lived in prayer and fasting. In the exterior she seemed devout, however she had a lot of pride and considered herself a saint. She was so resentful that if she had quarreled with someone, not only would she not have forgiven him but she would not also have wanted to see him in front of her.

One day she was ill and asked her Spiritual father to come have her but she did not confess properly. Many superficial Christians who conceal the bigger sins and reveal the more trivial ones, are used to doing this. Finally, when the priest brought the Holy of Holies in order to commune her, she turned her head towards the wall and could not even bear the sight of the Sacred Pearl. At that moment, God granted that she confess in a loud voice:

- As I did not forgive those who were at fault and would turn my face away from them, likewise the Lord is now turning His head away from me and does not want to enter my unworthy soul. I will not see Him in the heavenly Kingdom but will burn in eternal hell.

And in this way breathed her last...[2]

The prayer to the Holy Theotokos (Panagia) in the Small Compline mentions the presence of the evil spirits: **"...and at the time of my departure (from this life), care for my miserable soul, and drive from it the dark visions of evil demons...".** Here we beseech the Most Holy (Panagia) Theotokos to drive away the dark faces of the evil demons during the time of our death.

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1 II Cor. 6,2

2 *Metamorphosis*, magazine, 10th issue, July- December 1998 (Missionary philanthropic and educational Charity of Agrinio)

According to the examples that we have referred to it becomes obvious that when the soul sees the demons it is afraid and trembles and asks for the protection of the Angels and the Holy Theotokos (Panagia).

Also, Saturday's Midnight Prayer is indicative of thepresence of telonia-demons.

"...May the evil counsel of the adversary not bind and fetter my soul through the sins which I have committed in this life in knowledge and in ignorance. Be gracious unto me, O Master, and may my soul know not the gloomy and darkened vision of the evil demons, but may the bright and shining angels receive it. Give glory to thy holy name, and lead me unto Thy Divine Judgment seat by thy might. At my judgment may the hand of the prince of this world not seize me and drag me, the sinner, into the depth of Hades...". The Prayers say it all.

Many times tranquility and serenity are depicted in the face of the departed. Sometimes the face is sweet and pretty other times it is even bright... Sometimes it becomes very childlike, very content, as if it is sleeping peacefully and again other times a freaking agony and hardness is depicted on the face and those who are present freeze. Of course, these elements are neither decisive nor do they confirm the soul's course. Nonetheless, the monks usually refer to them. Only our Lord and God, Who knows the hearts of men knows. God's judgment is an abyss.

With all that has been mentioned about Partial Judgment, about the Middle State and the check pointing of the souls by the evil spirits we come to the **conclusion** that: The Church's supplications, the prayers, the Memorials, the Trisaghion services, charities, fasting, prayer ropes and above all, the Divine Liturgy, are of great benefit to the souls of our brethren who have fallen asleep.

All the accounts and views of the Fathers of our Church concerning the telonia that have not yet been encompassed by the validity of the Dogma belong to the devout Tradition. The "Middle State" of the souls however is Dogma. This phrase characterizes a way and quality of life. It does not refer to the **"where"** - it is only known by God - but to the **"how"** the souls live in the Middle State. This "how" defines the foretaste of Divine Blessedness or the grief of eternal hell.

The Middle State takes places after the soul's "first" or "Partial" Judgment, which takes place right after the soul is separated from the body. This **"first"** or **"Partial Judgment"** of man is also our Church's Dogma.

We will conclude with an incidence which was mentioned to me by a grandchild of a certain priest many years ago during Confession.

87. When he was about 5-6 years old, his grandfather who was a priest died. They buried him the following day and on the third day the boiled wheat had to be read on his grave.

Everybody left home and headed for the cemetery. It was a sunny evening. Two of his aunts remained home in order to prepare coffee and treats and offer them to the rest of the relatives when they would return from the cemetery. The little boy stayed with them. Suddenly, someone knocked on the bottom door of the house.

One of his aunts tells him:

- Go, open the door and see who is knocking downstairs, sweetheart.

The little boy went downstairs and when he opened the door... what was it he saw? He sees his grandfather the priest! Alive!

- How about it granddad, how did you come here? Didn't you die? He said in a naive tone. And how come you are soaking wet?

It was as if the priest from his hat to his toes had just come out of the water, he was that wet. The water drops were dripping, they were running on down the wooden floor...

- My, my! How did you become so wet! Fine, it is not raining outside, how come you are soaking wet?

- Listen here, my little one! This is not raining water. I am sweating agony! For three days I've been going through the toll booths [check points]... Tell your grandmother, uncles, and aunts, your father, and mother and all the others, that I have been going through the toll booths [check points] for three days! Now, I am redeemed, now I have escaped, now my little boy, I am saved! When they return tell them to bend down and lick these waters which remained on the floor for it is the sweat of agony. In this way they will be convinced that I talked to you...

And he disappeared! The boy opens the door again to look outside to see where his grandfather is, where he has gone and there was no granddad!

His relatives returned..., and indeed there was water forming a lake on the floor, as it was running down from the priest's cloak, his beard as well as his stole. The little boy narrated it to them but they would not believe him. However, when they bent down to lick the water then they were convinced. It was salty! For sweat is also salty...[1]

Commemoration of names during the Divine Liturgy, charity, trisagions, memorials, fasting, vigils, full prostrations - whenever we are healthy and are able to - prayer ropes, prayers... while there is still time. Tomorrow it may be too late. Today is "the day of salvation", it is an opportunity to pray for ourselves and for the others and for the dead... and a little bit for our Spiritual father.

"Again we pray for... all our fathers and brethren, the Orthodox departed this life before us, who here and in all the world lie asleep in

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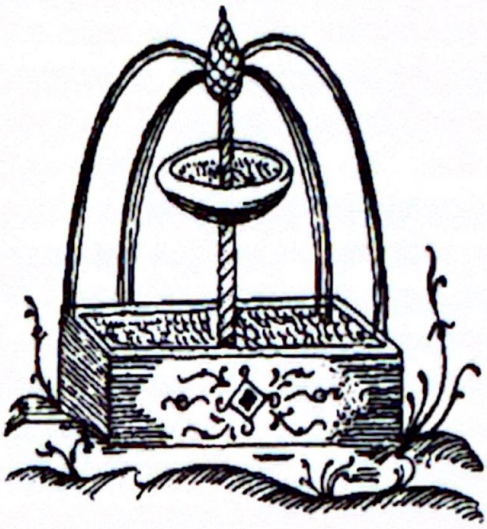
[1] Personal notes

the Lord..." After this petition two other petitions follow: **"For mercy, life..."** and **"for those who bear fruit and do good works..."** while the priest simultaneously reads out the brief Prayer of the Ektenia of Fervent Supplication: **"O Lord our God, receive this fervent supplication of thy servants, and have mercy on us according to the multitude of thy mercy, and send down thy compassions upon us and all thy people, who await thy great and rich mercy"**. That is to say: Lord our God, receive the great and warm supplication that is offered to You by your children, Your servants, and have mercy on us while opening up Your tender mercy to all of us and all Your people who await from You Thy abundant mercy.

This proctamation, in which the Prayer ends, is also a doxology to the Holy Trinity: **"For thou art a merciful God and lovest mankind...".**



9. THE ORDERS OF THE CATECHUMENS AND PENITENTS

After the Readings, the sermon and the Ektenia of Fervent Supplication, the Celebrant Priest immediately makes reference to the Catechumens.

- **Who were the Catechumens?**
- **How did they come to light?**
- **Are there any Catechumens today?**

May you be provided with the answers, starting from the first Christian years. If an idolater expressed the wish to become a Christian, the faithful used to lead him to the local bishop in order to be numbered in the order of the Catechumens. They would not be baptized immediately. **Saint Gregory Palamas** informs us of this: "As soon as the bishop finds out that he who wants to be baptized has come forth, primarily he himself like another imitator of the Good Master, ascribes, in spirit, a thanksgiving to God, the only one who wants and is the cause of whatever is good. Then he convenes the faithful of the Church, of whom he is the shepherd, in order to con-celebrate the salvation of the person who has entered so that they may them to work all together (on his catechism). Afterwards he asks him who has entered the reason which led him to the Church of Christ. When he responds that he longs, for with his and the other Christians' intercession and synergy, to become God's child and accomplish the heavenly divine goods, the bishop tells him that since he is approaching a true, perfect and sinless God his arrival as well as his whole subsequent life should be characterized accordingly. And when he agrees that he wishes to live in this way the bishop seals him and orders the priests to write his name down among the hosts of the ones who are saved, as a lover of the life-giving life".[1]

The Catechumens were allowed to enter the Holy Church Temple, to stand in a certain place, usually in the Narthex, to attend the Divine Liturgy but not all of it. They would pray together with the other Christians and, after having heard the readings, the sermon, the ektenia and the special prayers for the Catechumens, next the deacon would call them and they would step outside at the proctamation **"let none of the catechumens remain"**.

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[1] Kallinikos K., protopresbyter, *The Christian Temple*, ibid, p.415

The catechesis would usually last for about three years. In the third year the Catechumens would prepare themselves for Baptism and especially during Pascha. Hence, on Great Lent, whoever was bound to be baptized would enter the order of the "those being illumined" or "those preparing for the holy illumination". There is an Ektenia supplication for them during the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. They used to depart along with the Catechumens, prior to the Liturgy of the faithful, at the proctamation: **"As many as are preparing for illumination, depart..."**.

In the ancient Church, however, apart from the Catechumens others were also obliged to step outside the Church although they had been baptized, although their names had been written in the books of the Church as faithful, because after the Holy Baptism they were not careful and had committed deadly sins that were made known to people thus causing scandal to the communion of the faithful and giving rise to accusations that were coming from the pagan idolaters. They had to remain outside the Church according to the rule. Those among them who would honestly repent would later be allowed to remain, like the Catechumens, inside the Church Temple and attend the Divine Liturgy up to the sermon, after that they were obliged to leave.

88. In 1979, the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, I was preaching in Saint Basil's Church in Piraeus on the occasion of the feast of Saint Mary of Egypt. The theme was repentance.

I referred to the different categories of penitents and to confession which took place in public during the first years of the life of our Church, inside the Catacombs and in the Holy Temples of that era.

A person around 60 years old who went to Church had a great obsession from which -and at that age- he could not be relieved and therefore could not partake of the Immaculate Mysteries.

The following Sunday, Palm Sunday, there was a hierarchical Divine Liturgy. When with the Grace of God we had reached the end of the Liturgy and all the priests stood before the Royal Gate for the Dismissal, as the deacon was saying "let us pray to the Lord" and while the Metropolitan was about tot start the Dismissal with the words "The blessing of the Lord and his mercy come upon you...", above the bishop's throne we heard the loud voice of a Christian...It was the Christian that I previously referred to with the great obsession.

So, above the bishop's throne he twice shouted loudly: "I am such and such a person... such and such...". And he mentioned his obsession. Before the whole congregation in a Church that was filled to capacity he confessed his obsession! We were all astonished, and speechless. However, the bishop was not stunned but continued and finished the Dismissal prayer.

And what was the result of this confession? As he was telling me later a heavy weight had been lifted off his shoulders, he was relieved

from his obsession once and for all and there was a celebration when he received Holy Communion for the first time.[1]

My recommendation is: when you confess, you should confess your transgressions with honesty and precision.

We come back to the order of the penitents, although there has been a concise reference to it.

To those who committed deadly sins, the Church, in order to save their souls, in an educational way, would give them a heavy penance and canons. These were the **"penitents"** and they were divided into different categories, which were the following:

◆ **Firstly: The excommunicated.**

The Church would cut them off completely from its Body and considered them dead. Only after a repentance that was big and proven in action, after they had confessed and signed a libel, would they once more be received in her bosom. Moreover, "the ones who had denied God through sin" belonged to this category. According to the sacred Canons, those also who were absent from the Divine Worship for three Sundays consecutively without any serious reason -like health reasons- were excommunicated as well. Today this measure has been abolished. In those days it was applied and thus its results were beneficial. The Church would decide and the Christians were totally obedient.

◆ **Secondly: The crying and afflicted.**

It concerned Christians who had committed deadly sins, who remained outside the Church Temple, in the countryside, come winter or summer (in snow, rain, cold weather, hail or extreme heat) and would ask from the Christians that would enter the Church, in lots of tears, on their knees, to pray so that God would forgive them. They would not even receive Antidoron.

◆ **Thirdly: Those who fall.**

Inside the Church Temple those who were considered "falling" were constantly on their knees, even on Sundays. Due to the large number of sins they had committed they would only receive the bishop's blessing - if there was one - or that of the priest who would perform the Liturgy, and would depart from the Church together with the Catechumens.

◆ **Fourthly: Those who stand in obedience.**

They are the majority of Christians today who are under a certain penance that forbids them to receive Holy Communion. They attend the Holy Liturgy until the end and receive Antidoron.

There was another category of Christians who stood in obedience. They were inside the Church Temple during Divine Worship, they partook

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[1] Personal notes

of the Immaculate Sacraments but the Church forbade them to knead prosphoron bread, that is to say bring Precious Gifts for sanctification (offertory, nama = the wine used in the Holy Eucharist, candle, oil...) to the Church Temple.

◆ **Fifthly:** Another category of Christians, who also remained in the Nave, departed the Holy Church Temple together with the Catechumens. It was those who were **under the influence of unclean spirits**. Even though, they were baptized they were demon-possessed.

The **"Apostolic Injuction"** refers to them as follows: When the deacon proclaimed "As many as are catechumens, depart. Depart, catechumens", also addressing those who were under the influence of unclean spirits, he would say: **"Pray for those who are under the influence of unclean spirits. Earnestly, all of you, pray for them so that our Befriended God through Jesus Christ rebukes the unclean and evil spirits and delivers His supplicants from strange authority...Those who are influence, depart"**.[1] In other words, let them also depart. This ancient liturgical order like so many, waned or rather was abolished.

The late and lamented and blessed **Father Yervasios Paraskevopoulos** says the following for those who are under the influence of unclean spirits: "It is not forgiven, when the liturgy of the faithful starts, to dance, to speak loud, to blaspheme and behave in an disorderly way, by means of our brethren who are suffering (that is, those who are under the influence) of the noise provoking demons, who are concealed and being hypocritical and in fact during the time when the faithful are invited as "mystically portraying the Cherubim" to welcome the King of Glory".[2] Nowadays, there is much leniency, tolerance but also disorder!

◆ **Sixthly: the hearers.**

The hearers could have been Jews or Gentile idolaters who used to enter the Narthex listened to and saw the first part of the Divine Worship - and especially attended the sermon - and afterwards together with the Catechumens they would step outside the Holy Church Temple and the synaxis.

While those crying and afflicted would remain outside, the hearers, even though they could have been Jews or Gentile idolaters, would step into the Narthex!

The deacon would say aloud to the "hearers": **"Let none of the hearers remain? Let none of the unfaithful? Depart..."**

During the moment of their departure the Celebrant used to pray with fervor for them, so that they would not feel embittered, supplicating: **"That the Lord God, the All-Merciful, may open the ears of their hearts... catechize them with the word of truth... grant them a virtuous life... etc".**

The interest of the Church for the "hearers" was real to the point that most of them would depart the holy synaxis of the Divine Worship with tears in

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[1] *Apostolic Injuction*, Book 8, issue 2, p.5

[2] Paraskevopoulos Yerv. Archm. *Interpretive Overview...*, p.148

their eyes. During these prayers the people used to chant multiple times and in a spirit of devoutness the prayer **"Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy"**.

Many pious and respectable Gerontas and representatives of our Church believe that it is imperative, for today's conditions, that we create **a new order of repentants**, who immediately need to be catechized and re-annunciated. They would rank among: the indifferent, the lukewarm, uninformed, the ignorant, the hard-hearted, those who are in doubt, those of faith, those who are not in good faith, the unrepentant and many others...that is to say, all of us! For we all know very few things about our faith, and almost nothing about it and its Mysteries are not revealed to us by our All-Good Triune God, because the states of passion reign in us. Our minds are darkened. Darkness!!! The spiritual life of us all is in a mess...

We, the shepherds, are indifferent. The "fold" unprotected, and unfenced. The land is uncultivated, unclear. Hence, the sheep like wolves plunder the reasonable souls unhindered, "for whom Christ gave His life". On behalf of all these, we are being judged as negligent and lacking in the Orthodox shepherding of the rational Flock of Christ. This is a harsh reality for which all the shepherds will give our APOLOGY during Judgment day. Being a priest nowadays is not easy. They kiss his hand, they also prostrate before him, however that which is hanging from his neck is very - very heavy. May God have mercy on us and may you pray for all the priests.

The example of Bishop Nikiphoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, shows what stance the Church should keep, and particularly its bishops, towards moral corruption.

89. When Bishop Nikiphoros (829 A.D.) saw the well-known noblewoman Markezini, who was the lover of the Emperor of Constantinople at the time, entering the Church of Panaghia in Vlacherna to attend the Liturgy immediately he told her to leave the Church Temple!

He asked her to settle the sin of adultery by showing real repentance and accepting her penitence. Until the end of her penitence she would remain in the Narthex, like all the penitents together with the Catechumens.

All the bishops' commands were pronounced so loud that they were heard by all the Christian church-goers. In fact, the historian Eusebius kept a record of this incident in his "Historical Chronicles".[1]

From what we have discussed so far, the Narthex was:

◆ On the one hand, the pedagogical reformatory of repentance not only for the mere Christians but also for the nobles and kings,

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[1] Kallinikos K., protopresbyter, *The Christian Temple*..., p.145

◆ On the other hand, the spiritual womb of the Church, in which the Catechumens would be given birth to and later on with the bright tunic of divine blissfulness, which they would wear during Holy Baptism, would have their eyes would opened to the light of life in Jesus Christ.

"Let us, the faithful, pray for the catechumens, that the Lord will have mercy on them; that He will teach them the word of truth; that He will reveal to them the Gospel of righteousness; that He will unite them to his holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church".

In this prayer there are four petitions, which the faithful ask for the Catechumens.

- **first:** that God may have mercy on them,
- **second:** catechize them with the word of truth,
- **third:** reveal to them the Gospel of righteousness
- and **fourth:** unite them with His Holy Church.

These four petitions are of great importance for they show the Church's real interest in the Catechumens.

Thus, the first thing we ask for the Catechumens is that God may have mercy on them.

In the second petition we pray that they may be given faith.

◆ **FAITH** towards the Got-Manly nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son and Word of God and God, the world's Savior and your personal Savior and mine, and of us all!

◆ **FAITH** in the Trinitarianness of God.

◆ **FAITH** that the All-Holy One (Panagia) is the Theotokos, the Mother of God, the Ever- Virgin.

◆ **FAITH** in God's Providence and in Miracles.

◆ **FAITH** in the immortality of the soul.

◆ **FAITH** in the Saints, their miracles, in their holy Relics, and in their holy icons.

◆ **FAITH** in the Holy Tradition.

◆ **FAITH** in the Second Coming and the righteous Judgment of God.

◆ **FAITH** in the eternity of hell and Paradise…

FAITH… FAITH… FAITH…

This faith is God's gift that God gives not to everyone but to those who have the good intention to believe and live according to His will.

Faith!!! Do we have faith? We do not need anything else. No material wealth. All the wealth in the world cannot be compared to faith. It is this faith that God will ask for when He comes back during His Second fearful Coming. "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"[1] Truly, will He find faith in our hearts, a true, living faith that of a martyr?

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[1] Luk. 18,8

Nevertheless, let us recall the executioners of the Holy Martyrs, who constituted a special and peculiar **category of Catechumens**. Following the numerous and terrible tortures the Martyrs suffered and seeing

- their steadfast faith,
- their undaunted morale,
- the pervasive tranquility expressed on their countenance,
- their joyful acceptance of their martyrdom,
- their tolerance during torture,
- their love, revengelessness, forbearance, and forgiveness for their torturers, would deeply shock the latter causing a spiritual divine renaissance in their souls and they would spontaneously confess faith in Christ the Savior, immediately after their own Baptism, the Baptism of Martyrdom followed. Their conduct and stance -the result of the Martyrs' steadfast faith during the dreadful tortures was most of the time a living catechesis, the most powerful catechesis for the executioners and for the rest of the idolaters and gentiles who were present, but also for the Christians' a reinforcement and might for their confession of faith.

The first Christian Church used to change the **names** of the Catechumens. It would suggest and give names that had a combination formed by the word Theos (God) or Christos (Christ). (For example, Theophilos, Theophilia, Philotheos, Philothei, Theodoros, Theodora, Christodoulos, Christodouli, Theoktistos, Theoktisti, Dorotheos, Dorothea etc.) Let the majority of us hear this for we insist to give our children names that have nothing to do with the history of our Church, with the glorifying names of the Martyrs and Holy men which in turn remind us of their faith and virtue.

Yet, we come back to the matter that deals with the process of Catechism as it used to be done in the ancient Church.

During the third year of their Catechism the catechumens would be called "those approaching illumination", who during Great Lent used to come to Church every day while the first Hour was being read. Then the exorcisms would be read to them. With the exorcisms the soul would be freed from the influence of the devil. The daily Catechism used to follow the reading of exorcisms. As the cleansing of the soul would reach its completion, the foundations of the faith would also be laid.

A week prior to the Great and Holy Week, Catechism was based on the Symbol of Faith (**"THE TEACHING OF THE SYMBOL"**). On Palm Sunday the bishop would examine those approaching illumination to see whether they knew the Symbol of Faith (not by heart) as well as if they could apply it to real life.

Apart from the Catechism and the exorcisms that took place in the Church Temple, those being illumined, during Great Lent would undergo an intense spiritual struggle, according to **Saint Gregory the Theologian**:

«Καλόν σοι βοήθημα πρός τό τυχεῖν, ὧν ἐπιποθεῖς, ἀγρυπνίαι, νηστεῖαι, χαυμενίαι, προσευχαί, δάκρυον, οἶκτος τῶν δεομένων, μετάδοσις».[1] That is to say, fasting, vigils, prayers, tears, supplications, physical hardship and a large number of other spiritual struggles, together with charity. All these things were being practiced by the Catechumens. These are the spiritual struggles that we are all in need of for we are all catechumens in repentance...

During Great and Holy Saturday's service that led to Easter Sunday, Satan would be renounced and allegiance to Christ would be pledged. And on the night of the Resurrection the process of Baptism would follow.

The custom that prevailed in the Orthodox Church and deals with baptizing people at an infant age, the so-called **"Infant Baptism"**, contributed to the complete quashing of Catechism prior to Baptism. However, this Catechism the Godmother/Godfather and the parents undertake to do is only by necessity. The word "Godmother/Godfather" refers to the responsibility each of them has to teach the child at least the basic Dogmas of the faith.

- How to pray,
- how to study the Holy Bible,
- how to fast,
- how to be abstinent,
- how and what to confess,
- how and when to go to Church,
- when to receive Communion,
- how to protect their senses,
- how to obey their Spiritual father and the Church,
- how to respect the Holy Tradition...
- all that is related to the teaching of the Church, to the God-Manly nature of Christ, to the Holy Theotokos (Panagia), the Saints...

The Godmother/Godfather has a number of spiritual obligations, for which there is absolute ignorance and indifference, and at times, hostile confrontation.

90. The monk Aghapios used to live in the Monastery of Dionysiou on Mount Athos. When he was still in France, he used to lead a life of immorality, full of debauchery... He was a builder and his name was Anthony. (Pay attention to the way in which he was catechized in the holy faith of Christ... This does not mean that he was not a Christian, but he needed to be re-evangelized.)

So, one night a young shepherd appears in his dream and tells him:

- I am Demetrios from your home town... Do you remember me? Take heed and do not sin again and I will be protecting you!

He woke up and was wondering:

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[1] Saint Gregory Theologian, GCF vol. 4, p.299

"I wonder who it was! Which shepherd by the name Demetrios was it?"

He was not able to find him.

The following day, while he was working he fell from a seven leveled scaffolding and was saved, without even a scratch! Everyone (French and Greek) were telling him: "A Saint helped you for you were saved from such a height!"

After recalling the dream he had with Demetrios he understood that he was saved by Saint Demetrios. And Saint Demetrios became his pratron saint. (The Church in his home town was dedicated to Saint Demetrios.)

Since then his life was careful, without sin, and he would go to Church every Sunday. He learned some prayers from a friend of his who was a tailor and would say them.

One morning while he was praying, the same young man, Saint Demetrios, appears before him! And asks him:

- What prayer is it you are saying?

- Holy God..., All-Holy Trinity..., Our Father..., he replied.

- Ah, very well. But I want you to learn, the Saint told him, also the hymn "Moses marked with the Cross..."

- But, sir, he says, I do not know it... How will I learn it?

- Listen to me... and learn it. And the Saint started chanting it very melodically.

Anthony remained speechless, filled with awe and admiration. Yet, he pointed out certain objections for he was uneducated and illiterate.

- How will I learn this? I can't do it!

- I will repeat it to you.

Again Mr. Anthony was full of objections.

- Then, you will go to your friend George, the tailor who chants in the Church, and he will teach it to you.

And he vanished!

Skeptical as he was, Anthony went to his friend the tailor and revealed to him the apparition and the Saint's mandate. When his friend heard all this he was surprised. However, since he had a lot of work to do at the time in his tailor's shop, he told Anthony to come back in the evening. In fact, Anthony came back in the evening; George chanted it for him many times and even wrote it down on paper for him to learn. Then at one point the tailor was illumined and told him:

- Mr. Anthony, abandon everything my friend, everything. You are destined by God for another way of life. Pack your bags and leave now and go either to Jerusalem or Mount Athos...

(He narrated this story to Father Lazarus Dionysiatis who served him during his illness in 1954.)

- Since then, Father Lazarus, I have started thinking of abandoning the world and the sinful life I used to spend with women and drunkenness and the other things, as you know, for I don't want to chatter, I sold everything I had and came here to Mount Athos.

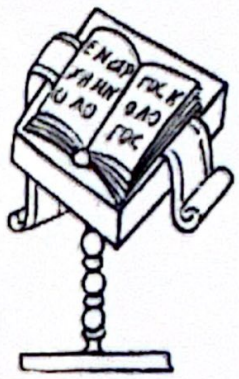
- Ah, good for you, says Father Lazarus. You are praiseworthy. You wounded the devil greatly at that age, when you escaped from his treacheries.

Mr. Anthony abandoned the world and went to Mount Athos where he became Monk Aghapios at the age of fifty.[1]

God is not constrained by time. He calls man to the path of salvation at the most appropriate time. He chooses many ways to bring every man close to Him.

What is done today by the Church through sermons, the multi-varied missionary activity, catechism, the large number of books by the Church Fathers that are being published or through the ecclesiastical radio stations, to Father Agapios, the former Anthony, God Himself did it through Saint Demetrios. This is how He called and catechized him.

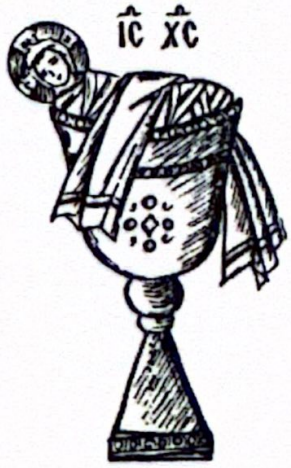
And today all of us are being catechized and re-evangelized in the word of salvation. Let us not turn our backs to God's calling but take advantage of it, as best we can, with the Grace and help of our Holy God through the Most-Holy Mysteries.



[1] Lazarus Monk Dionysiatis, *Narrations from the Holy Monastery of Dionysios*, ibid, p. 65-66

PART II

THE LITURGY OF THE FAITHFUL



1. THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

On October 15th, we commemorate a Martyr-monk's struggle and his story which is beneficial. This incident was written in the 12th century by Mavrikios, deacon of the Great Church of Christ, and is as follows:

91. A certain monk used to live in a Skete in Egypt and for many years was under the obedience of a Gerondas. Due to the devil's covetousness and after having succumbed to his demonic attacks, the monk violated his obedience and after he abandoned his Gerondas he went to Alexandria in order to become a missionary. His Gerondas had actually warned him that he will be given a severe penance in case he was disobedient. Nevertheless, the latter did not listen to his Gerondas. In fact, he followed his will and went to the city of Alexandria. Those were the last years of Christian Persecution.

There, in the city he was arrested by a noble man who was an idolater (because he was wearing the vestment of a monk) pushing him to deny his Schema and faith in Christ. However, he was brave enough to be persistent in his belief. That was when the monk was stripped of his Schema and severely whipped. Yet, he remained steadfast in his faith, so after his long-lasting torture, the executioners decided to behead him. And so they did. They grabbed him, chopped his head off and threw his body in the outskirts of town so that the wild beasts would eat it.

Nevertheless, the pious Christians, who were present during his martyrdom, one night secretly took his holy Relic. They anointed it with myrrh, wrapped it in a clean sheet and placed it in a reliquary, as is proper for a Martyr. Afterwards, they placed the reliquary in the Holy Altar of a Church Temple in the city of Alexandria in order for it to be honored as the Relic of a Martyr.

Still, every time there was a Divine Liturgy and the deacon would proclaim "All Catechumens, depart. The Catechumens depart; let no Catechumen remain", the reliquary with the Relic of the Holy Martyr would be raised in the air and would move from the Holy Altar above the heads of the faithful to the Narthex where it remained until the Dismissal! When the priest would say the words "Through prayers of our Holy Fathers..." once again the reliquary would return to its place, that is, inside the Holy Altar.

Everyone wondered. They marvelled at the event, but could not interpret it. The faithful were both in awe and fear. They took refuge in a discerning and famous ascetic of the Church, in order to be given some kind of explanation to this paradoxical event. The ascetic took refuge in fasting and prayer and was given an answer.

Days later, an Angel of the Lord appears and tells him:

- Do not marvel or wonder. This brother who was worthy of shedding his blood for Christ, in fact is not allowed to be in the Holy Altar whenever there is Divine Worship, when the Bloodless Sacrifice is being offered, be informed that an Angel of the Lord takes him out and places him in the Narthex. For when he was the underling of a co-ascetic of yours, he proved to be disobedient. And when he was given a penance and canon by his Gerondas, the monk left him and "bound" by the penance he went to Alexandria. As a Martyr, on the one hand, he received the wreath of martyrs, while on the other hand, he is "bound" by his Geronda's penance, so he cannot be in the Holy Altar during the Liturgy of the faithful, for he belongs to the order of the penitents, that is to say those whose canon is unsettled. Therefore, during the Liturgy of the faithful he must be in the Narthex, together with the Catechumens and the penitents. This problem can be settled, the Angel continued, if his Gerondas himself resolves the monk's canon, actually the former does not know that his underling monk martyred for his holy faith in Christ after refusing to sacrifice to the idols.

All this was revealed to this great father by the Angel of the Lord. As soon as this holy ascetic found out about all this, he took his staff, went to the Martyr's Gerondas and told him the whole story.

Then both of them went to Alexandria to the Church Temple where the relic of the Martyr underling was, opened the reliquary which contained the body of the Martyr and read the Prayer for the forgiveness and resolution of the canon and penance given by his Gerondas. Finally, they kissed him, closed the reliquary, prayed for a long period of time glorifying God, and left.

Since then, whenever there was Divine Liturgy, the Relic of the Martyr- Monk would remain still in its place in the Holy Bema, filling the whole Church Temple and those who were present with a sweet-smelling savor.[1]

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[1] Laghis, Matthew, *The Great Synaxarion*..., ibid vol. 10, Athens 1964[2], p.333

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Therefore, "good" is not sufficient for man's salvation. Let us not forget that there is also the bad side of man and no one can boast about having an all- pure heart.

- "...But every man is a liar", according to the word of the gospel.[1]
- Man "tends to evil things from his youth", the wisdom of the Holy Scriptures assuredly adds.[2]
- "For who shall be pure from uncleanness? Not even one; if even his life should be but one day upon the earth",[3] that is to say, there is no man who is not unclean.
- "For in many things we all transgress", the word of God ascertains elsewhere.[4]

That is why I insist. For a good man, a good Christian and a reverent and holy man are **THREE DIFFERENT** types of man. And our faith wishes us to be holy and gods by Grace.

It is of no benefit if we go to Church habitually, without faith in Christ and especially in His God-Manly nature, as well as in the work of the incarnate Dispensation and the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. Thus, before the Mystery of Divine Eucharist is performed, the deacon intones: «**As many as are of the faithful...**».

We cannot be partakers of eternal life only with our good deeds and our supposedly charitable work, if at the same time we are not partakers in the TRUTH of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, of His redeeming Sacrifice on the Cross and His Resurrection.

No one can approach the Mystery of the Communion of the Holy Spirit, if he is previously not partaking in the union of faith. The common Cup of Life presupposes common faith. "Our faith is unanimous with the Divine Eucharist and it is established through Divine Worship", as **Saint Irinaios** assures.[5] Hence, we ought to be partakers in the Divine Liturgy every Sunday.

"AS MANY AS ARE OF THE FAITHFUL.... AGAIN AND AGAIN IN PEACE LET US PRAY TO THE LORD..."

"As many as are of the faithful" the deacon proclaims and then briefly addresses a supplication which ends with the word **"wisdom"**. The meaning of the word is: that which is about to be performed, constitutes a sample of God's wisdom for the salvation of the people.

The priest stands before the Holy Altar, spreads out the Holy Antiminsion (Corporal) and the eileton (a silken cloth on which is illustrated the

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[1] Rom. 3,4 [2] Gen. 8,21 [3] Job 14,4-5 [4] James 3,2

[5] Gregorios Monk priest, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.210

Descent from the Cross and the preparation of the internment of Christ's body) on the Altar in order to perform the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, while he says the **1st PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL:**

"We give thanks unto thee, O Lord God of Hosts, who hast made us worthy to stand even now before thy Holy altar and to fall down before thy compassions for our sins and the ignorance of the people. Receive our supplications, O God; make us worthy to offer unto thee prayers and supplications and bloodless sacrifices for all thy people. And enable us, whom thou hast placed in this thy ministry, by the power of thy Holy Spirit, blamelessly and without offense, in the pure witness of our conscience, to call upon thee at all times and in every place, that hearing us thou mayest show mercy upon us according to the fullness of thy goodness".

With this Prayer the priest expresses his own and the faithful's thanksgiving, for the great honor we are being given by God, for standing, at this hour, before the holy Altar inside the Church Temple. A Church Temple and an Altar that differ from all secular altars, especially those that are pagan and satanic.

Moreover, the Celebrant - Priest offers his thanksgiving to God for making him worthy of taking shelter in His tender mercies, for his own transgressions and for the ignorance of the people.

Next, he asks the Lord to make him worthy of the eucharistic Sacrifice and enable him to call upon His All-holy Name.

The priest's cleanliness is a prerequisite for him to be able to officiate the fearful Mysteries blamelessly. **Holy Chrysostom** stresses that the soul of the priest must be more purified than the rays of the sun. "For the priest's soul must be more purified than them".[1]

The priest "is in need of angelic arrangement and purification", **Holy Theognostos** stresses. "Otherwise, (the Saint continues), if we mix darkness with light and corruption with myrrh, we priests are definitely going to inherit the "woe", that is to say the perpetual lamentation and perdition of the soul, as sacrilegious...

Just think, he writes, how the hands that minister to these Mysteries should be! How the tongue that overflows with divine words should be and how much more purified and holier the soul should be which - through the Mystery of Priesthood - received so much Grace of the Holy Spirit!...

However, what eventually makes the celebrant worthy of officiating the Holy Anaphora is the "abyss of humility". Humble yourself as if you were a sheep led to slaughter, considering everyone superior to you. Reckon yourself ground and ashes and uncleanness and a dog. You should always mourn that you are made worthy of being invited to communion and a relationship with God through the imparting of the Holy Gifts of the dreadful rite, thanks

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 28, p.260

to God's unutterable philanthropy and inexpressible goodness", Holy Theognostos concludes.[1] The priest realizes in this humble state that he stands before the Altar, in Christ's place: «τόπον φέρει Χριστοῦ».

(All the priests - and especially the candidate priests - should frequently study the chapters of Holy Theognostos 13-23, 37-38 and 50-60 (from "Philokalia", volume 2, translated by Galitis. We shall greatly benefit from them.

The word **"AMEN"** that is chanted by the faithful at the end of the first Prayer of the Faithful, means that they too, like the celebrant, sense the height as well as the dangers of the service of priesthood. That is why all the people that are standing outside the Holy Altar, in the Nave that is, sympathize and pray along with the priest who is officiating the divine Mysteries. The word **"AMEN"** is not a heavenly thunder, like after the words "Blessed is the kingdom....", which is said at the start of the Divine Liturgy, but a brotherly support of the faithful in the struggle and the **agony** of the Celebrant Priest. (IS IT?)

We discover something which is very important in the first Prayer of the faithful: that disobedience of the divine commandments which are committed by the faithful, are called **"ignorance"**, while for ALL the clergy they are called **"sins"**.

For why is there such distinction and difference? Ignorance that characterizes the people as a rule, is considered the greatest evil, for it is one of the three giants that push man into committing a sin. Forgetfulness, ignorance, and indolence give birth to evil inside man's soul. They are the mothers who give birth to quite a few evil children, to wickedness and sin, in general.

We priests are at fault for the fact that people remain uninformed and uncultivated; however the laity is at fault also, for they keep stubbornly refusing to be cultivated and receive the seed of the divine word. And while the seed is being sowed, the gospel word does not get support, for it is scattered and thus fades away, "some by the wayside... some on the rock... some among thorns".[2]

It is not just a matter of making sure that the "transmitter" or "generator", the worthy priest that is, is working properly, but that the receiver, the believer in other words, is also in good condition. The word will be received provided that the "ground is good"; otherwise it will be cast away.

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[1] Gregory Monk priest, *The Divine Liturgy*..., p.212

[2] Luk. 8,5

All of us priests who have dared to shepherd the people and deal with the holy Mysteries of our Church day and night do not and should not have the ignorance that people have. The Law and the will of God through the word of the gospel are known to us all. Hence, our transgressions cannot be called "ignorance", like that of the laity, but "sins", as we are not in agony for the salvation of the reasonable flock, which we are shepherding. We are not people of fasting, vigilance, prayer and abstinence. Unfortunately, we are not experiencing to the extent we ought to the Apostle Paul's words "who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?"[1]. Has anyone of us stayed up all night for the salvation of one and only soul?

People commit sins ignoring the precise word of the gospel that is why they "shall be beaten with few stripes". Priests also commit sin even though they know the truths of the faith of the Gospel, therefore they "shall be beaten with many stripes",[2] for they are unworthy. Moreover, the people shall be judged for their disobedience to the will of God and their good and holy shepherd's saving exhortation.

92. Following the fall of Constantinople, an ascetic while walking through the ruins of the city came before a destroyed, desolated Church Temple and saw an unspeakable sight: A female pig with her newborn on the Holy Prothesis (table of Offerings)! He then started crying and sorrowing for this holy place had been profaned. At that point an Angel of the Lord appeared saying:

- Abba, why are you weeping? Do you not know that what you have seen is more acceptable to God than the unworthiness of the priests who used to celebrate here?

And the Angel vanished.[3]

The priest in fear stands before the Holy Altar conscious of his sinfulness, weakness, unworthiness

- asking God to forgive him for his "sins", and his people for their "ignorance".
- He fervently pleads with Him to make him worthy of offering the bloodless Sacrifice.
- He is also beseeching God to make him worthy of calling upon Him "blamelessly and without offense, in the pure witness of [his] conscience, at all times and in every place".

The priest who ministers and celebrates the Mystery of Holy Eucharist must have a "blameless", clean conscience, without any guilt!! Woe to cele-

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[1] II Cor. 11,29 [2] Luk. 12,47

[3] Monk Theoklytos Dionysiatis, newspaper *Orthodox Journal*, November 2001, p.3

brants of every rank who minister with a guilty conscience. And if by any case the fall into sin is heavy and deadly, he experiences the greatest misery, the greatest hell, the greatest weight. The conscience is protesting, it is shouting, it mercilessly disturbs and beats the mind and soul of the priest who has committed a sin. Its accusing voice is the merciless voice of God.

Holy Chrysostom epigrammatically stresses: "You are far better if you get stung by a scorpion than if you get stung by your conscience day and night..." And the Saint goes on by saying: The court taking place inside your conscience whips you numerous times without mercy. And if you do not truly repent it will torture you a lifetime, apart from hell that is awaiting you perpetually!..." And again he warns: "Comprehend, Oh Minister the Mysteries of the Church, how fearful it is to be accused by your own conscience; and to have this terrible accuser threatening you continuously inside your soul. The soul cannot tolerate, cannot tolerate this daily censuring of the conscience".[1]

93. Many years back a priest from a certain state with a thirty year service in the Priesthood visited me and after I had committed myself with the Mystery of Confession that I was not to reveal his name, he told me the following:

- During all the years in my priestly life I have not sensed anything from what I have been reading in the Gerondikon (sayings of the Desert Fathers), in the life of Saints and the books of the Fathers of the Church, that is to say, a spiritual transformation, the vision, theoria of uncreated light, divine consolation and rejoicing, revelations of the ineffable mysteries etc. Thus, I was overtaken by a sense of doubt and disbelief, even for whether or not the Bread and Wine are indeed conversed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Are they perhaps form and symbols and not a living reality? It seems that my psychosomatic indolence had literally worn me down...Why must I be in doubt? Why must I be in disbelief?

The answer I gave myself was that God does not reveal Himself to us, for the same reasons he had mentioned. Also, for we are unworthy of such a kind of blessings or due to pride and our other vices of which some are unspeakable... or because it might go beyond our capabilities or even due to the fact that we might not bear one such supernatural revelation or for certain other reasons which cannot be explored by us.

Three months later he visited me once again but this time he was extremely pale and slim. He seemed contrite. He mentioned to me that following our meeting that took place three months ago, his first Divine

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[1] Haronis V. *Saint John Chrysostom, Pedagogical Anthropology*, vol. IV, Athens 1994, p. 390-407

Liturgy was commemorating Saint John the Evangelist, May 8th. That is when he found himself before a shocking revelation.

As he was placing the Holy Cup on top of the Holy Altar after the faithful had received Holy Communion, he took the censer instinctively and in a boring way in order to cense the Holy Gifts and say "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens and thy glory above all the earth". And suddenly his eyes opened wide and he was filled with holy awe, fear and terror. He saw the Holy Cup enlarging as Fleshes were coming out and Blood was pouring out, on the Holy Antiminsion!!

At this fearsome sight the priest collapsed unconscious, having fainted. The sacristan helped him to come to after he had called the ambulance, for he believed that he had had heart failure. The priest was afraid and terrified of seeing the holy Cup. He was asking the sacristan persistently and after he was persuaded that everything was back to normal, he got up with difficulty as he was whispering:

- I do believe, Lord, I do believe! And wholly trembling he completed the Divine Liturgy. However, he was still gripped by terror as far as the Consuming of the Holly Gifts was concerned. He was perspiring until he managed to do it without the naturalness of the Holy Gifts changing.

He could not seem to rest for days. He had lost his sleep, his appetite, his speech. His conscience was eating up his innards due to his disbelief and doubt. How had he been able to perform this great Mystery for so many years? How did he dare with such lack of fear to cut the Body of Christ? How did he communicate Holy Communion without realizing what it was he was doing? Every time he was unprepared psychologically and physically...

Hence, all the nerves, selfishness, grudges..., so many passions. How darkened the mind is! How hard the heart is! How deadened are the spiritual senses!... To be conscience-struck as if you were bitten by a viper, for the times (hundreds and more) when Holy Communion would fall down either out of carelessness or nervousness, this had all come back. And as he was filled in agony he asked me:

-I am wondering, will there be any mercy for me?

A month later following this shocking and apocalyptic incident, the priest showed up in his Holy Metropolis and submitted his resignation. He stated that he will never perform the Holy Liturgy again, only partake of the Immaculate Mysteries rarely... And this will be done with great prudence and psychological preparation.[1]

As many as are priests..., let us take heed. As many as are the faithful..., believe!

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[1] Personal notes

The **Second PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL** begins as follows:

"Again and oftentimes we fall down before Thee and beseech Thee, O good One who lovest mankind, that looking down upon our petition thou wilt cleanse our souls and bodies from every defilement of flesh or spirit, and grant us to stand blamelessly and without condemnation before Thy holy altar. Grant also, O God, to those who pray with us growth in life and faith and spiritual understanding. Grant them always blamelessly to serve thee with fear and love and to partake without condemnation of Thy holy mysteries and to be accounted worthy of Thy heavenly kingdom".

Its interpretation is the following: "Again and for many times yet we fall down before You and we beseech You, You are a good God and lover of man, in order for You to bow down and listen to us so that You might clean our souls and bodies from every corruption of the flesh and soul, and give us to stand before Your holy Table of Offerings, without any guilt or condemnation. And to those who are praying with us, help, my God, that they may succeed in life and in faith as well as spiritual wisdom. Help them to worship You always in fear and in love, to commune Your holy and all-immaculate Mysteries without any condemnation and be worthy of Your heavenly Kingdom".

The second Prayer of the faithful ends with the proclamation which is heard for the first and only time during the Divine Liturgy:

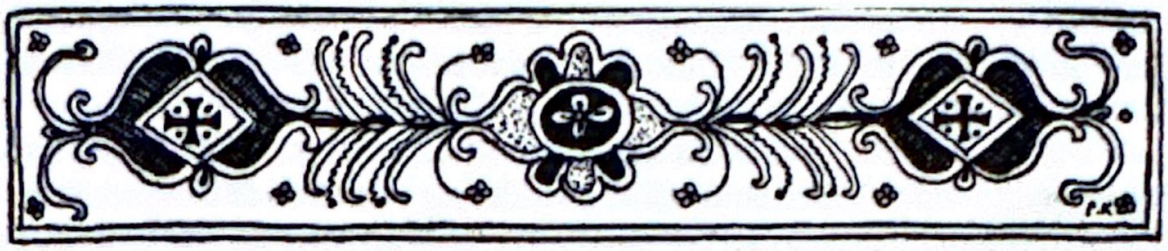
"That guarded always by thy might we may ascribe glory unto thee to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

That is to say: May Your divine power always protect us and may we glorify You, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

All the proclamations of the Prayers are a doxology towards the Holy Trinity. And here the word written by Apostle Paul is realized: "do all to the glory of God".[1] Whatever it is you do, say, think, do it for the glory of our Holy God.

Both Prayers constitute the opening of the gate, through which we enter henceforth in the holly ceremony of the bloodless Sacrifice in the Divine Worship, the Liturgy of the Faithful.

[1] ICor. 10,31



2. THE CHERUBIC HYMN

During one of our visits to the Holy Monastery of Saint David of Evia Father Iakovos Tsalikis, in the presence of my presbytera (wife of a priest) narrated the following incidence:

94. A Christian woman once confessed to him in the chapel of Saint Charalambos.

After her Confession, while her family stood in line in order to confess, she went to the main Church Temple and entered to venerate the icons. The Church Temple was empty. She lit a candle and started venerating the icons. However, as she was entering, for a minute she saw the Beautiful gate open and a nice, blond young man sitting on the Holy Table.

As soon as she saw him she started shouting at him:

- Aren't you ashamed, she told him, for sitting on the Holy Table? Step down quickly, get out... Nevertheless, that's how you young people are nowadays, spoiled, disrespectful, freeloaders, lazy, long-haired, anarchists... And who knows what else she told him.

But the young man interrupted her and told her in a sweet and heavenly voice:

- And you, why didn't you confess a while ago such and such a sin you had committed? And he told her exactly which sin it was.

She was stunned, dumbfounded, she remained speechless after having heard the Young Man's revelation.

- And who are you? She asked him as she was stuttering and trembling.

- I am the One Who you will be receiving tomorrow, He said and disappeared.

The minute she came round, she hurried to Father Iakovos, shouting in a state of panic after what she had seen and what had occurred to her...[1]

"I am the One Who you will be receiving tomorrow..."We are all in the Church, we welcome Him during the Great Entrance as **"King of all"**,

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[1] Personal notes

escorted by the heavenly Angelic orders; most importantly: we partake of Him "in food and in drink". "Unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting..."

The Divine Liturgy is a sacred Drama. It is a re-enactment of the whole Mystery of divine Dispensation. The shuddering Sacrifice of Golgotha continues but bloodlessly. When we are willing to attend the Divine Liturgy in a spirit of compunction, attentively, and with the unceasing Jesus prayer, it is then when we hear and see with the eyes of our soul and at times with our mind in ecstasy, wonders and wonders that are uncontainable and incomprehensible for the human mind; what goes beyond logic, the supernatural, God's Mysteries cannot be contained in the human brain. The incidences and stories that were experienced and which are being mentioned, testify it. And if one of us falls into the darkness of sin, malice, wickedness, but also in temptations and life's sorrows, let them not fall into despair; Christ the Lord lives. "...We have hoped in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe."[1]

In the first part of the Divine Liturgy up to the Gospel reading, we have said that Christ is the Teacher, the Prophet. We see Him during the Small Entrance revealing Himself to the world through the Gospel, in order to preach repentance, salvation and redemption to the generation of men. At the same time, in this first part of the Divine Liturgy we are also the ones who walk together and enter in the life of Christ and are welcomed by Him, so that we can listen to His word. This means and moreover constitutes an opportunity for us all to show our real love towards our brethren, after having listened to His word through the Gospel reading. The Divine Liturgy is the earth, which automatically bears fruit in love and unity. That is why in the Divine Liturgy, inside the Church Temple, it is not acceptable for the faithful to be strangers with one another. We are one family having one Father, we are all brethren. The faithful who is away from the Altar is a grain of wheat who self-condemns himself in loneliness: "he abideth alone".[2] He is sentenced to death by spiritual famine. If there is someone who does not remain inside the Sanctuary, inside the Divine Liturgy, inside the Church Temple, who does not eat and does not drink of Christ's Body and Blood, he lacks life.

We will seek and find Him primarily in the Divine Liturgy and then, as an extension, we will search to find and unite with Him in the social context where we live, within the family in fact. "...for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"[3] John the Evangelist inquires.

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[1] I Tim. 4,10 [2] Jn. 12,24 [3] I Jn 4,20

The second part of the Divine Liturgy begins with two very touching **Prayers of the Faithful**, which are said prior to the Great Entrance.

After the priest exclaims **"that guarded always by thy might we may ascribe glory unto thee to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages"**, the laity begins to chant the **Cherubic Hymn** through the chanters. The hymn that is chanted during all the Liturgies (except for very few cases: during the Presanctified Divine Liturgies, Great and Holy Thursday and Great and Holy Saturday) is as follows:

> **"Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing the Thrice-Holy Hymn to the life-giving Trinity, lay aside all worldly cares, that we may receive the King of all invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia".**

We interpret, in the simplest manner, this present hymn that we usually hear in every Divine Liturgy with great difficulty, for what comes to mind is different from what is written by hand, and what comes to the heart is different from what comes out from the mouth.

"Us Christians (clergy and laity, all) who mystically represent the cherubim and chant to the life-giving all-holy Trinity the Thrice-holy hymn, let us put aside every worldly care in order to welcome the King of all Who is invisibly being escorted by Angelic hosts. Alleluia."

With the Cherubic hymn the Church is inviting us to walk along with Christ the Savior the path of Martyrdom that leads to Golgotha and the Sacrifice on the Cross thus casting away every worldly care from within our souls.

While the priests' feet are standing before the Holy Table and their mortal eyes are enjoying what is being performed, visible and invisible, as much as possible, as much as it is provided by God, as much as God wants and as much as they are worthy of... (we are all wretched, unworthy...). And while their ears are listening to the spiritual odes of the Cherubic hymns spreading their hands, as those of Moses, in fervent supplication, the mind of the reverent and holy priests intermingles with the invisible world of the cherubim and together with them enters the most heavenly Altar, in the Triumphant Church of Jerusalem Above and he becomes awhole light and he becomes a whole fire and divine fire, as he is bathed in the divine radiance of the All-Holy Spirit. And the mind is forgotten there..., lost in the heavens..., lost in divine glamour of the unapproachable uncreated triune Light... How? "God knows". The Lord only knows.

"The soul of a Christian who has not learned how to become alienated from worldly cares during the Divine Worship, will never be able to admire the all-heavenly..."Mind and heart will not be gloried in splendor by the inconceivable grantness of the heavenly Altar and the angelic hymns.[1]

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 47,414

Father George Karslidis a twentieth century sanctified figure who in 1959 had a holy repose in a place called Sipsa, the province of Drama, used to tell his small simple flock: "No one among you should enter the chapel with worldly cares, concerns, fears, and a troubled conscience!!! Above all, you should not enter with a sense of guilt. First, you should put everything aside and then you may enter the Church Temple. That is when you are being received by the Honorable Forerunner and your Angels...You are entering with them into the heavens' Royal Palaces...You are stepping on the place that dazzles with the Sun of Christ's Presence and that of His Most Immaculate Mother our All-Holy One (Panagia). You are living in the heavens together with the Prophets, the Righteous, the Martyrs, the Holy Men, the Unmercenaries, the Angels, the Cherubim. How can you be thinking of the hundreds of worldy cares and concerns? If your mind and heart is filled with garbage, then these things will take you out of God's place".[1] That is what Father George used to say and during the Cherubic hymn when he would "get lost" into the inconceivable beauty of the heavenly Altar and of the Triumphant Church.

Something similar was experienced by a most pious Russian priest of Mount Athos, Father Tychon. The Aghiorite Celebrant of the Most High was taken to the same dazzling places of Heaven and of Jerusalem Above by his Guardian Angel during the Cherubic hymn.

95. During the Divine Liturgy he would tell the monk who was about to help him and would chant, to stay in the small corridor, outside the Church Temple, and say the words "Lord Have Mercy" from there so that Father Tychon would be able to feel that he was completely alone and therefore do his prayer by moving comfortably.

As he knew a little bit of Greek he used to say:

- During the Cherubic hymn, Guardian Angel raise me up... Half an hour, one hour, I do not know... Angel again put me down...

The minute this holy Celebrant would come round he would realiz that he was halfway through the Divine Liturgy and that he should continue. And would say:

- My, my! I performed Liturgy... I performed Liturgy... my, my!

They would ask him many times:

- Gerondas , what have you been looking at, what have you been listening to for such a long time?

And he would answer in a humble way:

- Cherubim, Seraphim, many-many, they glorified God Triune... My, my!

And he would lower his head in a compunctionate spirit, weeping.

Once he was visited by Father Theoklytos Dionysiatis. Since Father

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[1] Monk Moses Aghiorite, *The blessed Gerondas Georgios Karslidis*, Drama 1996, p.86

Tychon's door was closed and sweet chanting would come from the Church Temple, he did not want to disturb by knocking at the door, so he waited for them to finish, for he thought that they were at the "Koinonikon".

After a while Father Tykon steps out and opens the door. When Father Theoklytos entered he did not see anyone else apart from Father Tychon. Then he understood that the chanting was of angelic nature.[1] (I had heard exactly the same thing on Mount Athos).

Therefore, be very attentive from the Cherubic hymn and onwards, during the whole Divine Liturgy!!! All our thoughts should be focused in Christ. Let us not allow any other thought to disturb us. Everything in us should fall silent so that only Christ our Savior may be heard and seen.

Unfortunately, however, various worldly thoughts are bombarding us. We could be thinking of family and job matters, of life's many different adventures, thousands of worries that occupy us, sorrows, trials and tribulations. Some again have shameful thoughts, malicious, wicked and some of them even blasphemous.

All these thoughts must move away from our mind and conscience by the powerful fire of love towards Christ and the prayer: "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". When man's mind is fired up by his love for God, no sinful thought can stand.

"...lay aside all worldly cares, that we may receive the King of all".

While the Cherubic hymn is being chanted by the chanters and the people, the whole heavenly angelic world is cochaning too. And this is a vivid reality. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, "there is one Church, that of angels and humans"; heaven and earth were united into one Church, into one flock with one Shepherd, Christ. In order to be able to experience the ONE Church and the ONE Altar of heaven and earth, we must (that is why the Cherubic hymn is insisting) be distracted from earthen cares of our life.

"If someone is set on fire with love for God, he cannot tolerate to see that which come to his attention as far as his physical eyes and senses are concerned. But since he obtained different eyes, I mean the eyes of faith, then he always sees the heavens and that is what he ever thinks about. And even though he is walking on earth, it is as if he is living in heaven... And since he wishes to ascend from earth to heaven, he does not stop earlier, nor is he fooled by all things that are visible, that surround him, until he can ascend to the Holy Summit",[2] to the top of the heavenly Altar...

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[1] Gerondas Paisios Aghiorite, *Fathers and matters of Mount Athos*, Thessalonica 1993, p.26

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 53,259

To this "Holy Summit" we are taken by the **Unknown Holy Hesychast** (Hermit) with his description of divine ecstasy during the Cherubic hymn:

"Truly I say to you oh blessed flock of Christ's fold, greater than great is Priesthood's aid to the whole human race. For when the worthy and clean priest and Celebrant of the Most High, in the midst of many tears, before the Holy Altar and especially during the Cherubic hymn, bending the knees of his body and soul physically and spiritually before the All-Merciful and Man-befriending Savior Jesus Christ, beseeches for the souls, for whom He shed His Honorable and All-Holy Blood on the Cross, it is impossible for his supplication to not be heard.

When therefore, His pure and worthy celebrant, who sheds before the Holy Altar, like the cleanest oil, his tears, makes warm request of the Lord, how then is it possible for him not to be granted his saving and soul benefiting petitions? "The will of them that fear Him shall He do, and their supplication shall He hear..."[1]

The clean and worthy priests and Liturgists of the Lord, when during the Cherubic Hymn they knock - with that powerful Prayer "none of those who are bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh..." -on the heavenly gate of Jerusalem Above, immediately an endless number of Cherubim open the gates of heaven and receive those Priests who are worthy - together with the souls who are hanging from their Epitrachilion (Stole) - like lightning, even for a while, in order for them to bow down spiritually before the heavenly Throne of the Slaughtered Lamb. The priest prays down here in the Church Temple, the soul is in ecstasy and through the spirit venerates this divine Presence in the heavens.

However, from this heavenly stay at the throne of Grace, even for a few seconds, of these worthy Priests, their countenance on the inside and at a spiritual level is as bright as the light of the Sun. And if the Angels and Archangels and the Cherubim are flames of fire, likewise the Celebrants-Priests, are a heavenly flame of fire as far as the soul is concerned and as it is written: "who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers flame of fire".[2]

During this "snatching" of the worthy ones, - according to the Anonymous Hesychast's life's experience- all those among Christians who are also attending the liturgy and **"mystically represent the Cherubim"** are being "snatched together" as well. Where are they being snatched together to? In the all-heavenly Altar of Jerusalem Above. The Church on earth is transformed in such a way into such a piece of the Triumphant Church of every Church Temple, even of the poorest and plainest one, when the Divine Liturgy is being celebrated and particularly from the **Cherubic Hymn** onwards...

This is the ecstasy and divine vision of the **Anonymous Hesychast** (Hermit): "And while the Liturgist boldly is beseeching Him, the Crucified Savior Christ, he observes in astonishment the unutterable brightness of the

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[1] Psalm. 144,20 [2] Psalm 103,5

Seraphim, which, as they do not dare to look at the Lord's divine Countenance, cover their faces with their two wings, with the other two they cover their feet so that they may not be burned by the fire of Divinity, and with the other two they fly in reverence around the Throne of divine Majesty, while at the same time they chant melodically and heavenly "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God" and "alleluia, alleluia, alleluia".

And as the fearsowe time of the carrying of the offered Precious Gifts; The Great Entrance now set forth approaches, I would observe myself as a fiery flame not just merely a glowing fire of coals together with the Precious Gifts, nor again only a fiery flame, but I was at one and the same time both a pure fire, like the fire of coals, and a fired up flame of fire... all fire, all light! As I was observing this I was in wonder... The phenomenon was real, that is why I was in astonishment and wonder...".[1]

And one ascetic, many years ago, revealed to me the following similar incidence:

96. "Just as the Cherubic hymn, my father, had started and as my whole body was bent saying the Prayer in a spirit of compunction and great fear, an immense purity and incorporeal divine Knowledge illuminates my soul, so that I may comprehend inexpressibly the hidden Mysteries of God...

The Holy Altar becomes the place of God, the heavenly Altar where the priestly clean heart is set on fire, is embellished by the Divine light that is without beginning... Simultaneously, the sweet-toned melodies of the heavenly Powers ceaselessly glorify the blazing appearance of the Slaughtered Lamb...

You... the Officiator of Divine the Worship on earth, are numbered -by God's Power- with the all white Presbyters of Heaven, in the same Divine Liturgy and at the same time...

And wholly in ecstasy and amazement you will feel that you are living in the same all white dawn as them, which is always filled with the godlike beloved triune Light of the heavenly Altar".[2]

This divine light, the three-sun Glory and the uncreated flames, with concelebrating deacons, presbyters, and hierarchs of the heavenly Sacred Worship, many prominent Liturgists - Priests at times experienced and continue to experience, like Father George Karslidis:

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[1] Anonymous Hesychast's, *Neptic Theory*, ibid, p.219

[2] Personal notes

97. Eye witnesses say that during the Great Entrance he was also held up by Angels, for at times he was so weak, ready to collapse...

Then again due to this physical weakness and exhaustion, he was aided by Christians who would hold him by the armpits, one on the right and one on the left, so that he could perform the Great Entrance, as he was trembling. Those Christians, who used to hold him, would feel a burning sensation, without seeing something set on fire...

And as a safe confirmation of what they experienced when they held him, after the Divine Liturgy had been completed and since the holy Gerondas father George Karslidis had read the prayers for Dismissal, the sacred vestments that he would take off - chasuble, stole, belt, epimanika (maniples) etc. - he would throw them out to the Christians... Yes, he would throw them! And they - oh a superb and paradoxical miracle! - fire, flames, light would come out... without them burning. There was sweet, infinite warmth and a strange flaming outpouring of light.

And the Christians would not cease to kiss, embrace and place them in different suffering parts of their body - they didn't need any doctor for they had the priest's sacred vestments - they would also wrap them around their necks, cover or rub their faces and everyone was filled with joy... glorifying God for the father and Gerontas they had been granted...[1]

All this might sound strange; many might doubt and others might be of little faith. Some will say that it was a fallacy and others a fantasy beyond measure or a group suggestion. However, these thoughts are made by unbelievers and not by the faithful Christians who are striving. The faithful, the worthy, the purified, graceful souls, experience many of the unconceivable Mysteries of Divine Worship, but they are enjoyed in the mystery of silence and silent acceptance...

A number of Gerondas who have the gift of discernment and are undeludable can inform us about where truth and delusion or the pseudo energy of the unclean spirits is found. We simply transferred the experiences of other, worthy Celebrants of the Most High, and not our own.

How can all these fearful Mysteries be conceived and experienced when the soul and body are corrupted by sin? Thus, we doubt considering them too far-fetched. The soul is corrupted by exalting itself, by selfishness, vanity, pride, lust for power, gluttony, despondency, bearing malice, envy, wrath... And the filthiness of sin and especially of the greatest sin, pride that is, which we all have, with no exception, passes on to the body as well. The body as the soul's tool obeys to its commands. Thus: the tongue lies, accuses, criticizes, slanders, uses filthy language, bears false witness blasphemes false

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[1] Monk Moses Aghiorite, *The Blessed Gerontas George Karslidis*, p. 86

the Sacred, curses... If the Christian with such a tongue goes to the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, how will he be able to comprehend the Mystery of spiritual Worship? The eyes - organs also of the soul- what if they are to watch wicked and shameful spectacles or what if through them a sinful desire is passed on, how then will they be able to see the purity of that which is performed during the Divine Worship? The ears listen to words of disbelief, corruption, shameful songs, satanic music, wicked jokes, etc. with pleasure. Is it ever possible for such ears to spiritually perceive the angelic sounds of heaven and the melodies of the Cherubim? And again what if the hands make contemptuous and insulting gestures, steal, deceive, hit, kill, caress in a sinful manner, and play with dice, cards... And what if the feet run to places of debauchery and corruption... And what if with all the parts of our body we work sinfully, how is it possible for us to experience all that which has been said concerning that which is experienced by certain worthy Celebrant Priests but also by some faithful Christians? How? It is out of the question!

Nevertheless, it is not only the body that sins. The soul also sins with its bad desires, its wicked, shameful, and blasphemous thoughts. It sins by thinking and also inside the heart. And if the human eye does not see it, God however oversees everything. He is the One Who "searchest out the hearts and reins".[1] He sees what people tend to hide. The whole of man is terribly corrupt and filthy.

So, without a "purified body, a cleansed mouth and an illumined mind",[2] it is impossible for someone to experience in spirit the performed fearful and all-immaculate Mysteries of the Divine Liturgy. The Apostle Paul urges us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God".[3] Inside the Church Temple, during the Divine Liturgy, those of us who try, live together with the one Triune God. The redeemed with the Redeemer! The saved with the Savior! And the illumined with the Father of Lights!

98. Many times in the Divine Liturgy Father Savvas the Spiritual Father and Aghiorite, either during the Cherubic hymn, or the "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabbaoth...", would beat his chest and shed a river of tears. His clairvoyant eyes would undoubtedly see the Angels stand before the Slaughtered Lamb being covered in Blood.

They say that whenever he would serve the Liturgy, numerous times during the Cherubic hymn he would fall into ecstasy, look at the Cherubim intensely and hear the Thrice Holy Hymn and the word "alleluia". The monks-chanters used to wait outside for a long time in awe,

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[1] Psalm. 7,10

[2] Saint John of Sinai, *Ladder, Homily A, Based on renunciation*, Oropos Attica 1986, p.39

[3] II Cor. 7,1

so that the liturgist would come round after he was "caught up" in a sacred way. Angelic and heavenly hours of liturgical life... Joy to those who were present during that particular Divine Liturgy!

Father Savvas the Spiritual Father's liturgical life would move within this scope. A life filled with moments of great shocks, tears, angelic leaping, ecstasies, and the number of times when he was "caught up" in a sacred way.

Every time he would officiate the immaculate Mysteries, he would speak to himself loudly: "How fearful this place is, how fearful this place is! "The whole Holy Altar was "a flaming but unconsumed bush". A fearful place... the place of God![1]

This was Father Savvas the Spiritual Father's liturgical life. I believe that the lives of the following fathers were all alike: Father George Karslidis, Philotheos Zervakos, Father Tychon the Aghiorite, Father Porfyrios Bairaktaris, Father Amfilochios Makris, Father Iakovos Tsalikis, F. Demetrios Gagastathis and many others "of which there is no number".... And, of course, I do not exempt all those who have recently been canonized by the Church as Saints, like Saint Anthimos from the island of Chios, Saint Nicholaos Planas, Saint Savvas from the island of Kalymnos, Saint Panaghis Basias, and many others.

May the example of all of these reinforce in us the priests of today, some neglected truths, related to liturgical life and with the rich gifts that gush forth from the Sacrifice of Golgotha.

From what we have mentioned humbly, it has been proved that during the Cherubic hymn, through Divine Worship the Temple is transformed into heaven, with the presence of the living Triumphant Church...

All the faithful Christians who attend Church services, together with the priests, if ever there is a pang of conscience at least, we ought to be transformed into super-angels, for we are to become not simply escorts of the Heavenly King, but we are also going to receive Him in our hearts and through Holy Communion enthrone Him in them. Therefore, we ought to become like the Cherubim, which we represent in Divine Worship.

99. A father-monk, as I was told many years ago on Mount Athos, used to study and like a sponge would literally absorb the accounts of the holy Aghiorite fathers. Thus, he started to serve the Liturgy on a daily basis inside the plain chapel situated in his cell.

From the Cherubic hymn onward, the floor of the Holy Bema would rain a river of tears. The floor would turn into mud. Many times he was so much captivated by the spirit of compunction that it was impossible

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[1] Cherubim Archm., *Contemporary Aghirite figures, 6 Savvas the Spiritual*, Oropos Attica 1975[2], p.94-95

for him to raise the Holy Gifts in order to make the Great Entrance. His holy vestments - his chasuble in the front, his epitrachilion (stole) and tunic - would get soaking wet by the multitude of tears.

Since then he began to acquire a strange contrition... A kind of contrition, which as a humble attitude - his movements became humble, his word, his ways, his company ...everything - was extended to those around him... The monks of the surrounding Sketes, even the lay people, would constantly see a contrite father in front of them. This scene and his countenance were extremely beneficial for all. Humility was taught in a silent way to everyone. Was he or was he not a Super angel?[1]

"Mystically represent the Cherubim..."

However, we are made worthy of a greater honor than that of the Cherubim, when we are worthy partakers of the all-immaculate Mysteries. Why? For while the Cherubim are useful as thrones, we **enthrone** Christ in our hearts. And while they carry the Lord, we bear Him in us This Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ! Oh, divine forbearance! Let us rise from earth to heaven... Amen!

In Divine Worship the Cherubic hymn is not just grandeur, but also mystagogic and spiritually uplifting. It is called **Cherubic** from the first letters, with which the hymn in Greek commences «οἱ τά Χερουβείμ μυστικῶς εἰκονίζοντες...», as also occurs with many other hymns of our Church. They are named after the first letters.

In order to be more attentive and shake off all worldly cares, a contrite state must dominate during the Cherubic hymn: "What am I, a worm, before the Dominator of all, the Thrice substantial God, who became man for my salvation? What can I offer, poor, pitiable me, the incarnated Lord, Who owns everything and with His inexhaustible triune gifts that stem from His Sacrifice on the Cross and with the perpetual heavenly treasures enriches me and us all?"

Are we partakers in Christ's Passion with our personal sacrifices? Are we worthy of receiving the immaculate Mysteries? If yes, then we are immensely rich! We are strong! We are bright and beautiful! We are bearers of heaven! We are graceful! We are blessed! These are the triune gifts of Divine Worship!

Yet, a humble mind and a contrite spirit should dominate our inner self. A thought that can bring about contrition is the reminder of death.If we think that we might have heart failure by nightfall, if we are not to live tomorrow? Our egotism must be crushed not only before God, but also before other

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[1] Personal notes

Christians with whom we are surrounded inside the Church Temple. And together with them, as we humbled and they humbled and the Celebrant Priests humbled, may all of us offer as contrite servants our humble worship to our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

The Lord that is being sacrificed is asking us all to worship Him in one voice and in one heart. And no matter how many there are in the Holy Church Temple, few or many, we should have ONE VOICE of doxology and worship towards our God. Like the Angels! Like the Cherubim! In one voice, in one soul and in one heart glorify and worship the Name of our Lord.

Today's Divine Worship is not like that. We are not all one...We are, unfortunately, divided, not everyone is of one soul and of one heart. As a matter of fact, we must all, as members of the Body of Christ, be of one mind, one language, one mouth, one heart. This is a Miracle, which is realized through Divine Grace during the Divine Liturgy, but only to those who crush their ego and have a one and only will: the will of our Holy God.

The fact that we are not of one mind, one heart, one language, one mouth, is evident even before the Divine Liturgy has been completed. Firstly, from lack of order during the time when Holy Communion is being received by the faithful. And secondly, from lack of order during the distribution of the Antidoron (pieces of blessed bread)! The noise after the end of the Divine Liturgy should be an angelic, worshipping "noise". There should be a loving, forgiving, forbearing embrace. The way we tell our neighbor "good morning" should resemble the way in which the All- Holy (Panagia) would tell Her Son and God "good morning"! Inside the Church Temple we are not strangers but brothers, members of the one Body of Christ! We are not cattle, but members of Christ. All this is said in hope that one day we will all be like the first Christians of the Catacombs and Persecutions: One soul, one heart, one mouth...

During the Great and Holy Lent, in the very compunctionate Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, instead of the familiar Cherubic Hymn we chant the following hymn: **"Now the Powers of heaven are invisibly worshipping with us; for behold, the King of glory doth enter. Behold, the completed mystical sacrifice is escorted in. Let us with faith and longing draw near and become partakers of life everlasting. Alleluia"**.

What we chant in this hymn, is a holy reality. The Body and Blood of the Lord, truly **"the King of Glory"**, is already on the holy Diskos. That is why we kneel down in order to receive the Presanctified Holy Gifts.

100. Once a priest was telling me that during the Presanctified Divine Liturgy, when he made a silent Entrance with the "Holy of Holies" in his hands, he felt them getting very heavy... too heavy to lift, as

he was holding them... He was worn down by the weight... and at the centre of the Church Temple he almost kneeled down... He was overcome by terror, for he feared that the Holy Gifts would fall from his hands. And while he was weeping - the people were weeping along with him- he started praying to the Lord inaudibly, supplicating Him to give him the strength to rise, to continue...

- My Lord, he was shouting, have mercy on me a sinner... I am no longer worthy to be called Your Celebrant, but make me like...Your Cyrenian, that I might bear the Cross of Your Precious Body and Blood... Cyrenian, Lord...Cyrenian, Lord...Cyrenian, Lord!

And since he was shouting it somewhat loudly, the people repeated after him! And as he had regained his strength and little by little, with great effort, holy emotion, and lots of tears, he brought the "Holy of Holies" on the Holy Altar able... The place shone and myriads of Angels were chanting triumphant doxologies for the Entrance of the Great King. And he remained speechless, moved, spellbound, and unrecognizable by the divine transformations that had taken place...[1]

And what a great miracle is the clean and holy Celebrant of the Most High! And what is this Entrance of the Lord inside the Church Temple and our reception of Him, "as the King of glory"! And what vain receptions are held for secular rulers!

The way in which He is received and escorted by the heavenly angelic Hosts, should resemble the way in which our hearts...become heaven; become a Royal throne so that the King of all may be enthroned... However, in order for our heart to get to be a heavenly throne we ought to be "imitating Angels, imitating Martyrs, imitating Holy Men, imitating Saints, imitating Christ..."

Christ, the **"King of all"**, came down to earth. But He came without the external and vain characteristics of earthly rulers; without army, without violence, without persecutions, and exploitation. He was so humble that He was not recognized by people. And not only did they not recognize Him, but they crucified Him. Mean-while today we honor the paper idols of the rulers with secular authority and power, of the wealthy, of the STARS, of the politicians and of so many others that occupy various civil and social high points of this vain and fake world.

For two thousand years it has really been proven that no social system and no secular or philosophical ideology was able to solve humanity's serious problems and even more it could not offer peace, joy and happiness. The social and political systems will **NEVER** be able to save the world. Only Christ, the **"King of all"**, is able to save it. And He saves it with His Sacrifice and His unrivaled evangelical teaching.

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[1] Personal notes

Every time there is a Divine Liturgy and the Cherubic hymn is being chanted, Christ comes with the Holy Gifts of the Bread and the Wine during the Great Entrance. He comes in order to offer His sacrifice for the salvation of the world. The **"King of all"** is coming. The Christians on the other hand, all the ones who are inside the Church Temple, are invited to receive Him. To follow a double course with Him.

- **The first journey** will be the triumphant entrance in the Holy City of Jerusalem. And there holding the branches of palm trees in a noetic way, we will be crying from the depths of our soul and the bottom of our heart: "Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord."[1] In fact, the King of the new Israel, the spiritual Israel, the Heavenly one.
- And **the second journey** will be a martyrdom and bloodstained. From the Praetorium to Golgotha, from the North gate of the Holy Altar to the centre of the Beautiful Gate and on the Holy Table. Truly! How clean should our hearts be for this upward course of martyrdom with Christ!

We cannot imagine the spirit of compunction in which the Great Entrance took place in the past. Especially inside the majestic Church Temple of God's Holy Wisdom it was very moving to watch the emperor together with his superior officials during the Cherubic hymn go to the North gate of the Holy Altar in front of the hexapteryga fans which were carried by the children, in order to escort the Celebrants of the Most High in the Great Entrance. That is to say, the emperor, the officials, along with the candlesticks and the hexapteryga fans, made the Entrance. Hence, they honored the **"King of all"**. Uncovered and barefoot, at the centre of the Church Temple where the holy procession stood in order for the special supplication to be ascribed.

A tradition says that a certain king during such an ecstatic moment experienced the thrill of Christ's and the Angels' Presence, and collapsed in his royal clothes and crown!

What happens nowadays? If we are to take a look at our inner self, our hearts, and then around us there is a lot to be said about the spiritual poverty we are characterized by. Whether God incarnate has entered in us and we in Him, is testified by our conduct.

101. A gerondas, called Evlogios, who reposed in 1948, revealed to his disciple that while making the Great Entrance in the Divine Liturgy that in one of the feasts' of the All-Holy (Panagia) Mother of God, which took place in the chapel of a Skete's cell where he was an ascetic, he saw multitude of Angels gathering inside the chapel all together censing the Priest who was making the Entrance...

But, suddenly..., what does he see? Could it be that his eyes were deceiving him? Are they not capable of seeing? But no, his heart is content

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[1] Jn. 12,13

and is beating very sweetly for the sacred emotion he is experiencing...

What is it he sees? What did he see? The Holy Theotokos carrying a very beautiful heavenly veil and with it covering the Celebrant priest and the Precious Gifts... the "King of all"...

So, the censing of the Angels was heading towards this majestic and inconceivable scene...

All the chapel shone with light, with sweetness, with a sweet -smelling savor that was out of this world, with exquisite beauty and splendor...

The Entrance came to an end.... And everything was quiet and peaceful, as before. An inconceivable tranquility and sweetness dominated his being, the small chapel, all the Skete, all of nature...[1]

There is also a third Cherubic hymn, which is chanted once a year, during the Vesperal-Liturgy on Great and Holy Thursday, and it is known to all: «**Of Thy mystic Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of Thy mystery to Thine enemies, neither will I give Thee a kiss as did Judas, but like the thief will I confess Thee: Remember me, O Lord, in thy kingdom**».

The hymn refers to the Mystical Supper of the Lord with His Disciples, to Judas' betrayal and to the thief's confession. This hymn represents Great and Holy Thursday where Jesus Christ instituted the Mystery of Divine Eucharist.

A fourth hymn instead of the usual Cherubic Hymn is the very poetic hymn that is chanted during the Vesperal-Liturgy on Great and Holy Saturday. It is the hymn that expresses the profound mystery of silence and the awaiting for the Resurrection:

> **"Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and stand with fear and trembling, and ponder nothing worldly within itself, for the Kings of kings and Lord of lords cometh forth to be slain and given as food to the faithful. Before him come the choirs of Angels, with all principalities and authorities, the many-eyed Cherubim and the Eexapteryga Seraphim, covering their faces and crying aloud the hymn. Alleluia".**

This is one of the most ritualistic hymns of our Church, written in a truly sacred, angelic, poetic language. Here the inspired melodist of our Church is captivated by great awe for the extreme Sacrifice in Golgotha, where he sees the All-Immaculate Body of the Lord being slaughtered on

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[1] Ioannikios Archm. *Athonite Gerontikon*, ibid, p.100

the wooden Cross, and His Precious and All-Holy Blood sprinkling, watering and dyeing the earth, drop by drop.

It still very vividly recalls the words, which the Lord had told His Disciples and Apostles, that He would give them the priceless, heavenly, divine deified nourishment, His Body and Blood.

"Let us", says the hymn, "cease every word and discussion all the people of the world (not only inside the Church Temple... all the people in the world!) Let silence spread through-out the whole universe. Let everyone stand in fear and trembling. No secular thought and care should occupy their mind. And with bated breath may they attend the most fascinating event that ever happened in this world. The "King of kings and the Lord of lords" is coming forth to be Sacrificed on the Cross. He comes to be slaughtered, to offer His immaculate Body Sacred nourishment to the faithful. All the angelic Powers are preceding surrounding Him with infinite respect and worship and glorifying Him chanting alleluia incessantly."

We can observe that the three out of four **Cherubic hymns** have something in common: they name the Lord **"King"**. Thus, the rank of Royalty of our Lord Jesus Christ is being stressed. The melodist of the Cherubic hymn on Great and Holy Saturday names the Lord **"King of kings"**, not by his own inspiration. He borrowed it from the Apostle Paul, who says that our Lord Jesus Christ is "the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and lord of lords".[1]

In his Apocalypse, John names Him "King of kings".[2] There is the view that this phrase was a liturgical hymn in the first Christian Church chanted by the faithful during the ministering of the Holy Eucharist. This means that starting from the early Christian years the Church confessed and praised Christ, as King and Lord. It calls Him King of all kings, Lord of all rulers, master of all masters. He, as absolute Lord that He is, gives them their ranks or takes them away, according to His all-wise and all-powerful will. All earthly power stems from Him. That is why he had told Pilate: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above".[3]

The Church names Christ **"King"** in another particular sense. **Which is this particular sense?**

The answer being that Christ is not only the infinite and perfect God, one of the most perfect Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity, but at the same time He is also a perfect man. He is the Messiah and people's Savior; He is the Son of God, Who also became the Son of Man (the Son of the Theotokos).

The Holy Scripture attributes the rank of Royalty to the Son incarnate and Word of God. In other words, it names Him King, not only as God but also as man.

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[1] Tim. 6,15 [2] Rev. 17,14 [3] Jn. 19,11

This is testified by the following Scriptural verses:

- The Archangel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary: The son, Whom you will give birth to with the Holy Spirit, will be called Son of the Most High and God will give Him the throne of Your forefather David. He will reign as immortal and eternal King over the new spiritual family of Jacob. "...And of his kingdom there shall be no end".[1]
- The Wise men who came from Persia as they were guided by divine revelation, asked to bow down before Him "who [has been] born King". "Where is he that is born King...?"[2]
- In fact, Christ Himself "began to preach saying, repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand".[3]
- Christ told His Disciples numerous times that He would grant them the kingdom as a reward for their dedication: "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me..."[4]
- When Christ triumphantly entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He was received as glorious King in the Holy City.
- The Apostle Paul proclaimed that Christ is the King, Whom God the Father has highly exalted and enthroned "at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion", for He "hath put all things under his feet".[5] And God the Father granted Him a Name incomparably superior to any other name on earth and in heaven, and He named Him King and Lord, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth".[6]

Therefore, according to what has been stated Jesus Christ as Son of God, equal to the Father and to the Holy Spirit, has always been King and Ruler of all creation, visible and invisible, the eternal and firm King of all. When, however, He became man he offered the great Sacrifice, which also beginning and substance on earth, and extends to the ages of ages.

This Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of the Church, is also a Kingdom of FREEDOM. It does not force anyone to become its member and does not keep anyone by force. However, it receives those who wish to acknowledge Him as their "**King**" and Savior and follow Him. "If any man will come after me, follow me".[7]

And if later on someone changes his mind and wishes to leave, he is free to do so. In fact, Christ had once asked His twelve Disciples themselves, when He saw that they were somewhat shaken: "Will ye also go away?"[8] There are not any boarders and barbed wire and armed guards in Christ's Kingdom. Each one is free either to become or not become its citizen. Stay or leave. Let him freely and responsibly decide for himself what stance he is to take.

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[1] Luk. 1,33 [2] Mat. 2,2 [3] Mat. 4,17 [4] Luk. 22,29
[5] Eph. 1,20 and 22 [6] Phil. 2,10. [7] Mat. 16,24 [8] Jn. 6,67

In the name of freedom and love we are partakers of Divine Worship in the Church Temple. And in the name of freedom and love we receive the Lord, **"as king of all"**, in the Great Entrance's of martyrdom journey...

Something else which is noteworthy: During the dismissal of the funeral Service as well as the Trisagion, we say: "May Christ our true God, who rose from the dead and has dominion over the living and the dead, as immortal King..." Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Dominator and king of the living and the dead...

Christ's Kingdom over the dead as well, brings to mind the following incident:

102. Many years ago, a certain nun, asked me to give her a monastic rule so that she could help her father, who died without having confessed and without having received Holy Communion. Of course, he was being commemorated in every Divine Liturgy, as well as, in Memorials, Trisagion etc. However, she was asking to do something more on her own.

I recommended the following: That she read every night, apart from Sunday, the canon starting from Great and Holy Saturday of the Triodion dedicated to the souls and in every ode refer her father's name, so that he may be granted our Holy God's mercy. Moreover, I told her to add (as much as possible) certain full prostrations as well as prayer rope praying with combined, making the sign of the cross.

Six months later approximately, following the morning service, the nun went to her cell in order to rest. While she was saying the Lord's Prayer, all of a sudden, unexpectedly she found herself at her house. There, in the kitchen, she saw her father who was exceedingly sorrowful and hard pressed. His countenance had an expression of tremendous pain...

Let us note that when the nun did her canon and also during the Divine Liturgy (while she was commemorating his soul) she felt inside her a metaphysical agony, which was accompanied by great sorrow (it was as if she felt the struggle or the agony of her father's soul).

As soon as she saw him in this way, so sorrowful, she approaches and asks him:

- Father, how are you doing? How are you? Are you well where you are?

He replied in a very low voice that he is in a place that is dark, awful, a place that does not offer any comfort, consolation, hope... a place that is without consolation filled with of sorrow and darkness.

- But why father, his daughter, the nun, asks again. Is there no light there? Don't you also get to see God, so you may be able feel content and relieved?

And he answers very sad:

- The ones who see God and feel content in the light are the others.

They are in another place. We are without light, without joy, without any consolation, without any hope... And he started crying...

The man, who was never seen crying or moved, was now crying... Her heart was torn by this scene and she asked him:

- Father, tell me, how can I help you? What can I do for you?

At that point he made a deep prostration and kissed her hand, before she had the time to pull it. And with eyes that kept tearing, he told her:

- Thank you, my child, for the canon you have been reading for me and for whatever it is you do for me... They give me a lot of relief...

Immediately, he disappeared and the nun once again found herself in her cell, having a strong sense of her father's touch in her hand from his kiss. And then she exclaimed:

- Oh, Lord, the King and Lord of all, the God and Father of the living and of the dead, have mercy on my father...[1]

Whenever, we here on earth celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the Great Entrance in particular, we receive **"the King of all"**.

WHEN? When, indeed we portray the Cherubim. We receive Him both inside the Church Temple and in our hearts through Holy Communion **"as King of all"**, while there, in His own real Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, may the Same King and Lord our Savior Jesus Christ place us at His right hand. That will be a great and awesome day for all those who will be saved. Great and awesome, unsetting, unwaning, eternal, three-sun...

Thus, because of this:

- We must read the Holy Scriptures
- We must take heed of our thoughts, our senses, our eyes, our tongue all day...
- We must struggle spiritually the good struggle.
- We must endure...We must forbear.
- We must tolerate our brethren's weaknesses.
- We must have faith in Jesus Christ's Divine and human nature and His mercy.
- We must have hope, we must be merciful.
- We must fast, we must be abstinent.
- And we must pray without ceasing, especially with the prayer "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me".

103. Once on a Sunday Euthymios the Great was serving the Liturgy, together with His Priest and disciple, Father Dometianos.

After the Readings and the Ectenia had come to an end the Cherubic hymn started. And then..., oh! Then... an awesome and fascinating

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1 Personal notes

miracle occurred. All the monks who were present, all of them without any exceptions, suddenly saw a huge flame coming from above, from the Church's Temple's dome, like a sheet that was covering, like a flaming cloud, surrounding Euthymios the Great along with Father Dometianos inside the Holy Bema...

A fearful sight... and even more fearful, when they saw them making the Great Entrance surrounded by flames, the moving within them and with them...

Everyone fell on their stomach, for they could not bear the light and the brightness coming from the flames, in which those two worthy Celebrants were wrapped...

This reminds us of the Lord's Transfiguration on mount Tabor. I could shout: "Oh, how miserable are today's young priests!"

The two celebrants, flame bearing and light bearing, remained in this state until the end of the Divine Liturgy.

Indeed it was awesome, when it was time for the monks to receive Holy Communion. How could they go for communion while witnessing this fearful sight? With trembling feet, with dazzled eyes, with awe from within, amazement and in peace and rejoicing in their hearts...The heaven, paradise, the Triumphant Church, the Jerusalem Above, the Glory of our Christ, all were present, all within them... And all within us... for that is how it happens, even if we do not see it!

Inconceivable beauty and inexpressible blessedness, which was experienced by those who were partakers of that Divine Liturgy! How can one describe that which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard"? But in fact they saw and heard and experienced, that which was allowed by God to those chosen living earthen vessels.[1]

"That we may receive the king of all".

Perceptibly and visibly, all of us faithful Christians venerate and worship and receive the One and the Same Lord, the King of all, of heaven and earth!

Which one of us carries Him about? Who raises the Holy Gifts of heaven? The humble priest! Should I say "what an honor!"? I might as well. But also what responsibility! The Angels together with the faithful and the reverent Celebrants of the Most High, all of them together, co-dance with reverence and co-praise the common Master and Lord of all!

If the eyes of our soul were open as the Saints and as Saints Euthymios and Dometianos in the Divine Liturgy, which we described previously, what could we see? The uncreated fire of Divinity, the flaming clouds of the Holy Spirit, but also the large number of Angels and Archangels, filling up the Church Temple, standing next to each and every one of us, crowding,

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[1] Laghis Matthew, *The great Synaxarion*..., ibid vol. 1, Athens 1992[6], p.495

in order for them also to enjoy that which was performed during the Divine Worship on earth…

"No one who is bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy to approach or to draw nigh or to serve thee, O King of glory, for to serve thee, is a great and fearful thing even to the heavenly powers. Nevertheless, through thine unspeakable and boundless love towards mankind thou didst become man, yet without change or alteration, and as Master of all didst take the name of our High Priest and delivered unto us the ministry of this liturgic and bloodless sacrifice. For thou alone, O Lord our God, rulest over those in heaven and on earth, who art borne on the throne of the cherubim, who art Lord of the seraphim and King of Israel, who alone art holy and restest in the holy place. Wherefore I implore thee who alone art good and art ready to listen: Look down upon me, a sinner and thine unprofitable servant, and cleanse my soul and my heart from an evil conscience, and by the power of thy Holy Spirit enable me, who am endued with the grace of the priesthood, to stand before this thy holy table, and perform the sacred mystery of thy holy and immaculate Body and precious Blood. For I draw near unto thee, and bowing my neck I pray thee. Turn not thy face from me, neither cast me out from among thy servants, but vouchsafe that these gifts may be offered unto thee by me, thy sinful and unworthy servant; for thou thyself art he that offereth and is offered, that accepteth and is distributed, O Christ our God, and unto thee we ascribe glory, together with thine unoriginate Father, and thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

As soon as the choir starts chanting the Cherubic hymn, the Celebrant priest also starts reading the **Prayer of the Cherubic hymn** before the Holy Altar "in a low voice" and "for himself". It is the Celebrant Priest's personal and confessional Prayer, one of the most powerful and divinely-inspired prayers of the Divine Liturgy. It is one of the fewest Prayers of the Divine Liturgy which are recited to Jesus Christ, and it is the only one from among all the Prayers, that must be said mystically, to the point that it can only be heard by the concelebrant Priests that are present. While this prayer is being read many reverent Celebrants of the Most High, become so emotional that they shed so many tears to the point that their sobbing does not allow them to complete this wonderful Prayer.

Serving God can be an awesome experience! Who am I, a wretched and all wretched, a useless and unworthy, a repulsive, a worm of the earth, a "repulsive mucus", who stands shamelessly and indifferently before Him

Who governs all things in heaven and on earth, the "One that sittest upon the throne of the Cherubim"? Who am I before Jesus Christ's Divinity, Omnipotence, His All-Sovereignty? Nothing!!! Each Priest's "worthiness" is offered by the All-Holy Spirit, which through the bishop's hands clothes his soul with the divinely woven garment of the Grace of Priesthood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. When - may it not happen!!! - the Priest goes to hell, for "no one who is bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh iw worthy...", God takes backs the Grace of Priesthood, the divinely woven garment with which He clothed him. Woe to the Priest, for He "shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth".[1]

"No one who is bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy to approach..."

None of the priests ever approaches the Holy Altar, in order to serve the Divine Liturgy, trusting in his holiness. If he is ever fooled and believes that he is holy, he must not perform the Liturgy; in which case we have falaccy and heresy. But at this point, we should not say much, for the more we say, the worse it is for us. Here, we make the sign of the Cross, are silent, and we priests ask for God's mercy.

In order to comprehend what man is worth, for whom God's love can do anything, we ought to give some thought to the honor and worthiness of the high ministry of the Priesthood. The priest, as a human being might not be wealthy, strong, wise and a scholar, but may be humble and insignificant. From the moment, however, he received the gift of the Priesthood and is clothed in "the grace of priesthood", from that moment on the Priest receives spiritual power, which surpasses all secular power.

Saint Cosmas Aitolos used to say: "If I ever encounter the emperor of Byzantine, or the king and a poor priest on the street, I will first hasten to kiss the priest's hand and then greet the Emperor. And if I ever encounter an Angel or an Archangel or a Cherubim walking on the same road together with a priest, I will first hasten to kiss the hand of the Priest and then the hand of the Angel."[2]

The priest's blessing is Christ's blessing. It is Christ's Grace. Whether the priest is young, or elderly, or worthy, or unworthy, he bears Christ's Priesthood, he possesses His Grace and imparts His divine Blessing.[3] This is

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[1] Mat. 24,51

[2] Menounos John, *Father Cosmas, a narrative biography*, Athens 1969, p.85

[3] Theoklytos, Metropolitan of Aitolia, *To the conpresbyters*, Messologhi 1984, p.156

"Most Christians, father, from the depths of their heart believe that you communicate better with God, due to the gift of Priesthood, and thus your petition is granted.

why, as priests we are greatly responsible, as shepherds of reasonable sheep, as Celebrants of the Most High.

I recall that when I was a child, I used to observe the Christians of that time young, old, men, women, the elderly, the youth and children who would kiss the hand of any priest, with great reverence. As soon as he passed in front of them everyone would stand up:

- Your blessing, master, they used to tell him.
- Christ's and the All-Holy Mother's (Panagia) blessing, he replied.

In pain, in sickness, in a family tragedy, first, the Christians of that time would rush to Church searching for a priest so he could read them a Prayer, make the sign of the Cross with the Holy Lance, give them his blessing...

Even today, some Christians ask for it by saying and beseeching:

- Your blessing, Father, so that my child may recover or
- your blessing, Father, so that my child may do well in the exams and succeed or
- your blessing, Father, so that my husband's work may go well or,
- your blessing, Father, so that my husband may have a good trip.

Here I will make a parenthesis: Due to my illness, I was unable to relieve all Christians, all spiritual children, with the Mystery of Holy Confession. The illness, as you are already aware of, was caused by over exhaustion, something which the heart could not tolerate... and I yielded... A reverent and

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They approach you with this faith. They kiss your hand. They venerate you. They bow and prostrate before you, they kiss your cloak or your holy vestments.

By expressing such emotions they believe that they receive something from you. Exactly that which the woman who had a flow of blood, when she approached and touched the Lord's garment with her fingers.

And this blessing, which they receive from you, is power for the faithful, it is Grace and holiness. A relief within them selves. A rest of the soul. That is why they are in need of this blessing of yours and you should offer it with all your heart, with all your good feeling. For they count on it.

Be careful, with your blessing you can always be present to your spiritual child's needs. Thus, you should support it with your prayer, with your prayer rope praying, with your epitrachilion (stole), even from afar, in spirit... God is ever present. The Angels carry your prayers to God.

Whatever the case may be, you should never refuse to give your blessing, so that you may to support and reinforce your Christians, even on the telephone or in spirit. You are the Spiritual Father, who will run close to his spiritual children. You are the doctor, who will hasten to the sick, in order to help. Inside the prayer's petition the Christian's power of faith is hidden!

This reverence and faith of Christians to your person, when they see that it is pure, clean, selfless, ready for any sacrifice, this leads them to the Church, to repentance, to Holy Communion, to proper living.

faithful University professor, well-known throughout Greece and abroad, Mr. G. Papazachos, told me the following, when I mentioned certain complaints coming from Christians: "... If the people who come to you for confession, know that you are ill, are not relieved and are not comforted with your blessing, and your prayer for them, then, unfortunately, nothing substantial and spiritual was cultivated in them".

Many who enter a new house or purchase a new car or open a new store or office immediately call a priest for Holy Unction. The Grace will come forth from the priest who shall bless the new house or new job.

Battered by life's unexpected events, our Christians who have truly suffered from the many trials and tribulations hasten to a good priest in order to ask for help:

- A reading, Father, or a Trisagion, please.
- The sign of the Cross with the Holy Lance on my eye, please.

And at other times:

- A blessing, my father.
- A petition, master.
- An exorcism, teacher, as many islanders usually say.
- A supplication, reverend father, as the more educated say.
- Please, take this piece of paper and read these names in the Holy Altar.
- I am going through trials and tribulations, I am suffering, I am being tormented, says the Christian who is in distress. We encounter difficult moments at home, make a request; we have many tribulations, temptations.

Either because the husband is an alcoholic, a gambler, he stays out until very late at night, who knows where, he is rough, demanding, a tyrant, self-

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This faith and reverence leads man close to you. That is why he approaches you and does not move away from the vehicle of this blessing, which is you, through Jesus Christ.

The cold, indifferent, unfaithful, do not come near. They do not come to you. They ignore you. They move away from the Grace of God. They are fighting you. They also fight the Church. But with the power of faith we should behave well to these people and come near them. Life's adventures - who knows? - one day might lead them close to us.

We should not make them fall into despair. We should not scandalize them with our indifference. We should cultivate them and develop within them a little seed of faith, which may be hidden in their depths.

And when they approach us, we will pray for them. We will talk with God about their problem. We will beseech Him. "And the prayer of faith will save the ones who have yielded". And that faith along with your blessing will bring forth the outcome. The indifferent will be satisfied. The miracle will happen.

Making the sign of the Cross on the head and on the face, a prayer, a small blessing and the miracle is here... the heavens have opened...

And the bishop continues:

ish, he abuses physically, he blasphemes the Sacred and many other things.. Then again because the wife is jealous, because she complains, whines, blasphemes and curses her children or she is occupied with her dog or spends all day and night playing cards, or neglects her home...

For all these reasons and many more the Christians hasten near the priest, to their Spiritual father, with tremendous longing, for they place their hopes on him. He is more intimate to them. He is the one who reads them the Prayer of birth for it has been forty days since they had their baby. He is the one who baptizes the children, sanctifies them, catechizes them, gives them Holy Communion, and later engages and marries them. He is present in joy, he in sorrow, in sickness and in pain. He is the one who accompanies every Christian in their final dwelling.

Therefore, you Christians should go to the humble priest, your Spiritual father, your Geronda, to request something, which he only has. This "something", is not of the emperors, nor of the ones who govern peoples and nations, nor of the tycoons of wealth, nor of the glorious of the earth. It is the Grace of Priesthood. It is his supplication, his prayer, his blessing. It is his crucifixion. He has the Divine Grace of the master of ceremonies All-Holy Spirit, the Grace of the Holy Triune God! He serves mysteries and God makes miracles through it. He has the power of "binding and remitting" the transgressions of Christians. He grants remission but he also binds. He favors but he also canonizes. "You will partake of Holy Communion then". He stands between men and God. He is a little bit higher, but with a heavy load on his back. He stands much higher than all the people; he is the shepherd, the father, the physician.

Many confess miracles, which they saw after such a supplication, after a reading either in the Holy Altar or the Divine Liturgy, after a prayer, a supplication, to the All -Holy Mother (Panagia) of the Lord, with great emotion it was a heavenly response. May all the people - clergy and laity - not forget that "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much".

My brethren and concelebrant,

Our Christians believe in the priest's blessing. In your prayer.

The Apostle Paul always addressed this kind of supplications for the Churches' Christians. He did not neglect remembering them and beseeching God in their trials and needs. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy".

My brethren, you are the mediator between God and men. Never be negligent, whenever you are asked to mediate and pray. "Making request for you with joy", according to the Christ preaching Apostle. Your duty commands it. Just one prayer of yours is capable of extinguishing the furnace, which is burning up the chest of a certain soul and relieve it, cool it and many times lead it to repentance and salvation...

These were the useful and valuable ascertainment of a bishop for the worth of the priest's blessing and generally of the ministering of Priesthood... "

Father Joakim Spetsieris narrates the following about Saint Arsenios from Cappadocea:

104. In Jerusalem around 1890, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy in particular, there was a patriarchal, majestic Divine Liturgy. Patriarch Nikodemos was then first celebrant and concelebrants six Archpriests, twelve Deacon priests and more than forty Priests married and single. Most of the Priests were pilgrims from Russia, Greece, the East.

"I was also amongst the concelebrants, says Father Joakim Spetsieris. And continues: After the Great Entrance and when the Patriarch read the Prayer and blessed the Precious Gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ, one of the concelebrant Priest's countenance was radiant like the sun!... This caused amazement and wonder. It seemed that before me stood a Saint... with a glowing appearance!"

This extraordinary miracle was witnessed not only by Father Joakim but also by the other priests. After the Divine Liturgy was completed they wished to find out all about him and the location where he served as a priest. Father Joakim found out from the people of Pharasa the following:

"He is a holy Priest. He also does miracles. Look, if he reads a patient a Prayer, the person who is ill becomes well right away. We are not in need of any physicians there. Father Arsenios (Today Saint Arsenios of Cappadocia) is our physician. And not only we in Pharasa but also the Turks consider him a saint for he does miracles and cures their ill as well...

There is a large number of testimonies which say that when he threw out of the door of his cave the ashes from the incense he used, the Turkish women who were barren used to gather them, threw them in water, stir them, drank them and a few days later they conceived.

Spirit-bearet he was dematerialized, shining with divine light, for many times he glowed like the sun during the Divine Worship. The Church Temple was gleaming and along with Saint Arsenios his congregation and his small flock was scented by his holiness as well...[1]

Great is the honor of the Priesthood; however, great is the cross of responsibilities for the souls whom the Lord God committed to its trust.

"Keep - He tells him during his ordination - what was committed to you, and I will ask for it during Judgment time".[2]

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[1] Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, *Father Arsenios from Cappadocea*, Souroti, Thessalonica 1975, p.43-44 and 51

[2] "Take what was committed to you and preserve it until Jesus Christ's Judgment when He will ask you to give it back."

Christians are not aware of this; they only consider the privileges of Grace and of blessings for which they hasten to their priest. If one asks to be blessed from the Church of Christ, from him, from me, from the other, from everyone you know very well that his hand which blesses, has Grace, power, holiness, and you fill it with kisses... It is the hand, which touches "the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world"!

Since, therefore, the priest has such spiritual authority he is superior to kings and worldly rulers. He is superior to Angels and Archangels, for God did not give any Angel any spiritual authority for the remission of sins, for serving the Divine Liturgy and the other Mysteries. If this spiritual authority for the remission of sins and the serving of Mysteries was granted to the Angels, since the Angels have no idea of what sins and temptations with which people are tried, they are would not have been able to feel and be aware of human tragedy, human temptations, human difficulties, and men would have great difficulty would and be hesitant in approaching Angels in order to confess.

While the priest, as a human being is also sinful who on a daily basis faces temptations and fights against the triple evil of the flesh, the world and the devil, sees human weakness in action that is why he (the priest) listens with great sympathy and understanding, like a fellow sufferer, the sins of his fellowmen, his children with whom he was committed by God; and he is prepared to grant the remission of sins with all his heart, to those who have faith and repent in a sincere manner.

Of course, the things we are saying and preaching about priests might seem strange, but this is how they have been granted by God. Only he who truly believes in the Triune God and in the Divine and human nature of Christ understands, is aware of and honors the priest accordingly, for the spiritual authority that was committed to him by God Himself. In the priest's presence he venerates Christ's Priesthood, the Lord Himself. However, today unfortunately we live in times of anarchy, materialism, disbelief, and corruption and the Priests of the Most High are not honored as stewards of the Mysteries of God on earth.

"Wherefore I implore Thee who alone art good and ready to listen..."

These words are only intended for the priest and only the priest lives and experiences them. He, who by the Grace of God stands before the Holy Table, bows his head, trembles with awe and sheds many tears as he says: **"For I draw near unto Thee, and bowing my neck..."**.

And the Prayer ends with the proclamation:

"For Thou Thyself art he that offereth and is offered, that accepteth and is distributed, O Christ our God..."

This proclamation contains all the theology concerning the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, which is also the Priesthood of the Church. During the Divine Liturgy Jesus Christ is both the Priest who serves and the Lamb who is being sacrificed, and He who receives the Gifts, and He who is broken and distributed to the people. "He Priesthood, He Sufferer, He Priest, He Holy Altar, He God, He Man, He King, He High Priest, He Sheep, He Lamb, He everything and for our sake, in order for us to have life in every way".[1]

After the Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn, the Priest censes, while he recites the 50th Psalm in a low voice. The **incense** has a special place in the Divine Worship, especially while the Cherubic hymn is being chanted; in fact there have been various interpretations by the Fathers.

It reminds us of the scenting of the Lord's Body with valuable myrrh during His burial by the Myrrh-bearing women, the incense of the three Wise Men as well as the Apostle Paul's sermons that those who believe in Jesus Christ are "a sweet savor of Christ".[2]

The incense allegorically is mind and heart's uplifting towards the heavenly Throne of the Lord during our prayer, whether alone or inside the Church: "Let my prayer rise like incense before you".[3]

John the Evangelist's Revelation mentions that an Angel of the Lord came and stood on the Holy Altar, holding a golden censer. And he was given much incense, which were the prayers and supplications of the Saints of the Triumphant Church, in order to reinforce the prayers of the faithful of the Militant Church and offer them before God's heavenly Throne. Therefore, incense is the symbol of the Christians' prayer. And particularly the high priest or priest who censes, gathers - in a way- the prayers from the hearts of the Christian congregation.

It is a strong urging for prayer. This is why it urges them to send their prayers to the Heavenly Throne of God the Father, in order to draw His mercy. It is as if it is telling them: "My fellow Christians, pray, say the Jesus' prayer and send your hidden prayers to our heavenly Father. All of them united will perform the miracle. Which miracle? They will draw God's great mercy."And since this is the meaning of incense, it is the reason why the congregation must stand up from their seats leave their stands and bow when the celebrant incenses, (and if they wish make also the sign of the Cross), this is reciprocal to the priest's invitation for prayer.

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[1] Saint Epiphanios Konstantias of Cyprus, P.G. 41,980C

[2] IICor. 2,15 [3] Psalm 140,2

Thus, may our eyes and those of the priest's and of the faithful congregation, shed tears of repentance and may our sinful hearts be humbled, bent, may they pray and cry out loud: "Mercy, Lord! Mercy!!!"

Since we are made worthy of the honor to portray the Cherubim during the mystery of Divine Worship, more so we will be enjoying the honor of Angels and that of Archangels, when at the same time they see the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ spiritually carved in our heart's spiritual Bank!

105. Before the year 1940, in the cell of the Three Hierarchs, which belongs to the spiritual jurisdiction of the Holy Monastery of Stavronikitas of Mount Athos, there used to live a reverent Gerondas, Father Joakim the Romanian. Before this Gerondas perished, he went into ecstasy and saw a strange vision:

Since one morning he had completed the Divine Liturgy and consumed the Holy Cup, rather he had consumed it and wiped it, suddenly he sees many Angels on his right and left hand side. All of them were glistening with unutterable beauty and divine brilliance. The entire Holy Altar and the small Church Temple was filled with an inconceivable, amiable light and divine sweetness and beauty.

Then the Angels in one voice told him:

- We have come to take you...tell us, what are your deeds? If they are good and acceptable to God, we will take you to Him, to His perpetual joy and blessing; otherwise, we will take you to comfortless hell...

That blessed father was stunned and as he was stuttering he said in extreme humility:

- I did not do anything... I do not remember doing anything good...

- Well, then, what shall we do with you? Where shall we take you? Fifty years on Mount Athos and you have not done anything?

And then he replied:

- Well, since I became a priest, I served the Divine Liturgy every day. I would commemorate as many monks and fathers of Mount Athos as I could. For many years I would commemorate the names of people I was given in the world and I prayed for all the Orthodox Christians and for the whole world. I would beseech God's tenderheartedness for all those and had my hopes only in God's mercy, both for me and for the others. I shed many tears on a daily basis for the Lord Jesus Christ's and His All-Immaculate Mother's mercy... I hoped and only hope in the Holy God's mercy and forbearance... I do not remember doing anything else...

And then they replied:

- Not because of your deeds, but because you had your hopes only in God's mercy, very well, then come with us...

- Well, can it wait until tomorrow? So I can tell my Spiritual father and the fathers? Give me some time to prepare!

And the Angels' response:

- Very well then. We will be obedient and come tomorrow.

He came round after that ecstatic 'theoria' or vision of the spirit, as he was holding the Holy Cup in his hand, which he was wiping with the sponge with automatic, careful movements... He announced it to his Spiritual father and then to the two-three fathers of the synodia or brotherhood (a group of monks living together, consisting of the elder and his disciples). And nobody else.

And the preparation began through prayer and tears. The night that had come would also be his last Divine Liturgy, which those two-three fathers and his Spiritual father who were present recalled for years to come with great reverence and emotion. One of them, a Romanian narrated it to me.

That long lasting Divine Liturgy came to an end. Afterwards they went to the 'Trapeza' (the place where monks eat all together), sat down for the last time, had very little to eat. After a while he felt ill. He went to lie down. He continuously said the words "Remember me, Lord, in Your kingdom", "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me", "Most-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, save me"...

Towards the evening he felt heavier. At one point his face glowed... the cell was filled with unutterable savor...

- Fathers, forgive me... Lord, my soul is in Your Hands...

And saying this he fell asleep.

An inexpressible joy gave warmth to the hearts of those who were present...[1]

If the Celebrant Priest constantly and ceaselessly (especially after the Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn) calls upon in a noetic way or by whispering the Lord Jesus Christ's sweet Name saying the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me", then the angelic Powers, who revere, honor and glorify our Lord Jesus Christ in the triune throne of the Triumphant Church, revere and honor the Priest's heart, on which the Name of Christ the Savior is written, and which beats with His sweetest Name. This can also take place in the heart of every faithful who is praying in a noetic way.

This holy leaping fulfills the heart of the Celebrant Priest and the heart of the faithful who attend the Divine Liturgy with ineffable joy. He is content, but he does not know why. He is set on fire in a joyful and heavenly way. He wants to embrace everyone, kiss everyone's feet, ask everyone for forgiveness and also wishes to share this joy, pleasure and blessedness with all the faithful Christians. **For he loves them!** In this way the spirit and the

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[1] Monk Moses the Aghiorite, *Stories from the Holy Mountain...*, ibid, p.111-112

senses of the Celebrant Priest are guarded and protected after the end of the Divine Liturgy, during his spiritual struggles, from the envy and malice of the evil spirits.

106. The Celebrant Priest and Anonymous Hesychast writes that he had a vision of the spirit and saw a heavenly Church Temple filled in splendor...

In the centre of the Church Temple there was a majestic and glorified Archpriest, clothed in a full high priest's garment, as it is known today. The glow of the garment of this Great Archpriest was such that the Hesychast's tongue was "tied"... No human being's mouth could describe the heavenly beauty and gorgeousness of that divine Countenance... Thus, he remained speechless and amazed.

This heavenly and divine Archpriest was surrounded by a large number of white-clothed and brightbearing priests. Many of them Deacons were holding inexpressible censers with which they were censing the holy Archpriest, while the rest were Priests, with bright, reverent, gladsome and most joyful countenances. Their priestly garments were as white as snow, as clear as light and as blue as the deep blue, sunny sky.

Some of the priestly garments exceeded in splendor, brightness and clarity compared to that of the others. It was of a different sight, a strange vision of the spirit, which no human made of clay is able to utter and no human mind is able to comprehend; for how can the earthly conceive the heavenly? Then again others were clothed in glistening priestly garments, the way in which lightening flashes.

And some of them were standing on the Archpriest's right hand, others on His left however all of them were characterized by great reverence and decency.

Still that blessed Archpriest was so much glorified and exceeded the others in glory, splendor and grace the way the sun exceeds in splendor and brightness the stars in the night sky.

As this wonderful and beyond comprehension Archpriest was standing, he would look in the east and chant in a loud voice and clearly, somewhat briefly, a certain melody that was in every way most sweet and inexpressible. However, seeing that incomprehensible event taking place, the ascetic priest was amazed and by hearing that sweetest harmony and extremely delightful melody, he was in a state of wonder, astonishment, intoxicated by divine intoxication.

Due to the great admiration he was captivated by he could not retain the words that were chanted by that heavenly Archpriest and could not recall not even a word, not even one syllable, from what he heard although he was spiritually attentive. For not only did he know very well that he would be separated from that blessed "vision of the spirit" but also that those heavenly words would seem useful in his current life.

Finally, the words he was able to retain from what the heavenly Archpriest said and chanted was the following, which in the end he repeated in a loud voice:

- The more one remembers and loves God the more God remembers and loves him even more.

And immediately the Priest came round and in astonishment would note that his whole heart was burning with fire divine. He would feel it like a lit candle like a burning bush... And it was then when he recalled the words of the two Apostles when they reached Emmaus: "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened our understanding that we might understand the Scriptures?"[1]

Following the contrite **Prayer of the Cherubic hymn**, while it is being chanted, the **50th Psalm** commences. This psalm is not only a psalm of repentance but it also includes a large number of **theological facts**:

- **First:** There is the teaching of the original sin: "For behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother bear me".
- **Second:** It reveals that sin corrupts the whole human being and makes the soul abominable and foul-smelling before our Holy God.
- **Third:** It is made clear that sin is not only a challenge against God but also an insult and revolt and disobedience as far as His All-Holy will is concerned.
- **Fourth:** It stresses that only God can redeem all transgression with His divine Grace, that is to say His great mercy.
- **Fifth:** It seems that the remission of iniquity and sin is succeeded only through contrition and the tears of repentance.
- **Sixth:** It is acknowledged and proclaimed that an acceptable sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit and humbled heart.

Saint John Chrysostom says that the 50th Psalm is useful both for the righteous and the sinful. On the one hand, for the righteous so that he may not fall into indolence and laziness and take pride in his piety. On the other, for the sinful so that he may not fall into despair for his salvation, for great is God's mercy and infinite His divine-heartedness...[2]

Indeed! God's mercy is great and inexhaustible. His goodness is beyond limit. His forbearance is innumerable. His tender mercies are many. His love for man is infinite. And His divine tender-heartedness without limit...

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[1] Anonymous Hesychast, *Contemplating Watchfulness*, Sermon 12, ibid p.137

[2] Trembelas P., *The Psalter*, Athens 1970[2], p.165

Therefore, the 50th Psalm complements and assists the Celebrant's mystical Prayer that has preceded, so far as to throw about his soul -which so easily falls into sin - in God's mercy and love.

As the Celebrant Priest recites the 50th Psalm of repentance in audibly, he at the same time censes around the Holy Table, the Sanctuary and the clergy, the icons on the holy Iconostasis (the holy screen that separates the nave from the sanctuary) and then all the people. The priest censes the icons of Christ, of the All- Holy (Panagia) Theotokos and all the Saints the same way he censes each believer, who is God's image. His takes a look at all the congregation, as if he is looking at each and every one of them separately, and like the Angel of the Apocalypse he offers this incense "with the prayers of all saints".[1]

Immediately after the censing the Celebrant Priest makes three deep metanoias prostrations (low bow made while extending the right hand to the floor; the sign of the cross is made preceding or following each metanoia prostration), while saying supplicant, entreating, penitential words, such as: "my God, have mercy on me a sinner", "Like the prodigal son, I have sinned against thee, O Saviour", "deliver me from the mire of my deeds", "Lord, Lord, do not cast me away", and others alike that vary according to the priest.

Next, he turns facing the congregation and makes a small, pious but humble bow, and at the same time says two sentences:

- The first one: **"My brethren, forgive me a sinner"**,
- and the second one: **"Forgive, O God, those who hate us and those who love us"**.

The meaning of these words are profound and full of mystagogy and speculation. This first liturgical utterance addresses the brethren and concelebrants (if there are any), but also God's people, which he shepherds rationally. Even though he is a Spiritual father, however simultaneously he is a brother. The second one **"those who hate us and those who love us..."** is addressing God for God's people: that God who is All-Good may offer His forgiveness, His mercy and His divine tender-teartedness, as He did on the Cross. Why? For in a little while the suffering and upward march towards Golgotha will commence from the north door (door on the north end of the iconostasis leading from the solea to the prothesis - room or table north of the sanctuary where the Proskomedia is performed) of the Holy Altar, via the Church Temple, leading up to the Holy Table.

The priest's liturgical utterances are a special blessing, which are spread throughout the people, when there is the Divine Liturgy and at that moment each faithful bows down his head and accepts the Celebrant Priest's efficacious words with gratitude.

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[1] Apoc. 8,3

All these are not part of a theatrical play. The holy rite is a live action with true meaning, that is to say it corresponds entirely to whatever is being said and done. No utterance of the Divine Worship is void and none of the Celebrant Priest's words goes in vain, in the air. Everything has their significance. None of his actions is merely a scheme, but a real participation in what is being performed.

The priest later goes to the Sanctuary, where the Service of the Proskomedia has already been performed during Matins.

The **GIFTS** we offer for the Holy Eucharist, for the Divine Worship, is the bread and the wine. We offer bread and wine for these two are the primary nourishment with which our bodily life is maintained. For what is the reason that made us offer God our life's primary nourishment as gifts? "For God gives life instead of these gifts". For Life is given instead of these gifts. We give Him bread and wine and He grants us Eternal Life! The Holy Gifts are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

The gifts that we offer God for the bloodless Sacrifice, are the fruit of our work and labor, fruit of the earth (the wheat) and "fruit of the vine" (the wine).[1] (That is why instead of purchasing it from the baker's we ought to knead the liturgical bread).

We offer these gifts, for Jesus Christ Himself, according to ancient prophetic symbols in the Old Testament, served the first Divine Liturgy during the Mystical Supper with bread and wine. This is what the holy Gospels testify, that in the upper room that night Jesus Christ, during the Mystic Supper, blessed the bread and the wine and said: "Take, eat...." about the bread and "drink ye all of it..." about the wine.[2]

When the faithful offer their gifts, the bread, the wine, the oil, the candle, and the incense, the priest keeps only the bread (prosphoron - round loaf of specially prepared liturgical bread) and the wine (nama - the wine used for the Holy Eucharist) in the Sanctuary for the Holy Communion.

One, two, three or even five prosphora are needed in order to perform the Divine Liturgy. However, one is more than enough. One is enough for all the offerings, which are brought by the faithful every day, since all the offerings in the Church become one, one liturgical bread; like all thefaithful inside the Church Temple are one person, "we being many are one bread, and one body".[3] Therefore, we should not say: "Why, my father, haven't you oblated mine?" and thus complain, for in all the prosphoron there is the one. This one prosphoron is called **bread, blessing, offering, first fruit**. Jesus Christ offered Himself and the faithful offer their gifts; and within the one offering and Sacrifice of Jesus Christ all of our offerings become one offering, one common Worship and sacrifice to God.

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[1] Mat. 26,29 [2] Mat. 26,26-27 [3] I Cor. 10,17

"Inside the Diskos and the Chalice of the Table of Offerings, where the priest has prepared the replicas of the Body and Blood of Christ, the whole Church is present: Jesus Christ (Who came forth from the Most Holy Theotokos' bosom), on the right there is Panaghia, on the left the orders of Angels and Saints, in the front the living and the reposed. Along with it comes the material world also, found in the gifts we are offering, the bread and the wine, which is our nourishment, "through which bodily life was founded."[1]

Anybody can understand that the prosphoron and the nama that we offer for Holy Communion, should be prepared with attention and reverence. That is why there is a reason behind those **who are able to make the offering and whose gifts for the Divine Liturgy are accepted by the Church.**

The fourth order of "those who are in repentance", that is to say those standing in obedience, the Church prohibited the offering of Holy Gifts, for they were given a penance. And today priests, according to the Holy Canons, ought not to accept the gifts of those who sin and are impious out in the open and in a provocative way, those who freely and with all their impudence live as they wish for this is unsuitable for Christians.

Unfortunately, our lives are filled with such examples and we consider it impossible to cease such disorders, which harm the Church and expose it to the eyes of its enemies. The parishes are huge and therefore these things cannot be set under control. We consider it absolutely impossible to impose a certain order in these matters. We mention it, but damage continues to prevail. Those **who, for whatever reason, do not commune cannot also offer the Holy Gifts for the Divine Liturgy**. Of course, the Spiritual Father - Priest will arrange it.

After asking for God's and peoples' forgiveness, according to the ancient rule, the archpriest washes his hands before the Beautiful Gate. This action intends to show that the celebrant clean and unblemished by sin, is able to serve the Liturgy, in other words without any moral stain, as much as this is feasible for a human being. Then he can approach God Who is Clean and serve His divine Mysteries. On the one hand, this rule has been abolished for the presbyters while on the other it is rarely seen with archpriests. The washing of the hands for the presbyters has been transferred to Orthros (Matins) with a special Prayer, which is the following: **"I will wash my hands in innocence and I will compass Thine altar, O Lord, that I may hear the voice of Thy praise and tell of all Thy wondrous works. O Lord, I have loved the beauty of Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwelleth. Destroy not my soul with the ungodly, nor my life with men of blood, in whose hands are iniquities; their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, in mine innocence have I walked; redeem me, O**

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozanis, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid, p.272

Lord, and have mercy on me. My foot hath stood in uprightness; in the congregations will I bless Thee, O Lord".[1]

After the Celebrant Priest venerates the Holy Altar Table three times, bowing with piety and reverence before the concelebrants and the people and giving the blessing of love, he returns to the Table of Offerings and venerating the Holy Gifts he takes the Aer (Veil) saying: **"Lift up your hands unto the holies, and bless the Lord"** and he places it either on the deacon's shoulders, if there is one, or on his own, if he is serving the liturgy by himself.

When he takes the **Holy Diskos** with his right hand, he kisses it and after he has brought it up to where his head is, he says: **"God hath gone up in jubilation; the Lord with the voice of the trumpet"**. If a deacon concelebrates, he receives the Holy Diskos from the priest's hands, kisses it and brings it up to where his head is.

Next, the Celebrant Priest receives the **Holy Cup** in his right hand, kisses it and says: **"I will take the cup of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord"**.

And the chanters complete the Cherubic Hymn with the words: **"That we may receive the King of all..."**. And thus the Great Entrance commences.

[1] Psalm 25, 6-10

3. THE GREAT ENTRANCE

We are to notice four parts in the Great Entrance:

◆ **First: The process of carrying the Precious Gifts** from the Table of Offerings, via the Holy Church Temple to the Holy Altar.

◆ **Second: The cry of the thief on the cross** with the words "May the Lord God remember all of you in his kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".

◆ **Third: The reception of the Precious Gifts by the faithful,**

◆ and **fourth: The placing of the Precious Gifts** on the Holy Table.

The bread and the wine that are in the Sanctuary and are to be carried to the Holy Altar with the Great Entrance, are called Precious Gifts, as they are intended for the great Mystery, however they are not sanctified. That is to say, they have not yet been changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. This great Miracle will take place later on. Yes, it is not the Body and Blood of Christ, as in the Pre-Sanctified Divine Liturgy, but according to **Saint Basil the Great**, they are "replicas of the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ".

Only in the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy are the Precious Gifts that are carried by the priest, not bread and wine, but the Holy Body and the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, for they have been pre-sanctified during a previous Divine Liturgy on Saturday or Sunday or on a great feast. That is why, during the Great Entrance in the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy the faithful kneel on both knees while touching hands and forehead to the ground. They are worshipping Christ.

107. The previous year a Christian, whose grandfather was a priest in a village in the outskirts of Drama, came for confession. When he was little, he used to help his grandfather, Father George, in the Holy Altar.

Father George was a refugee from Asia Minor following the massacre in Smyrna and the burning of the city. Although he was illiterate, he was very pious.

The small Church in the village was poorly constructed, its floor was covered off-handedly with tiles, so Father George often used to stumble on them.

One Saturday morning while he was serving the Liturgy in the presence of five-six faithful people, he stumbled and almost collapsed with the Precious Gifts during the Great Entrance. His grandson then sud-

denly saw an all-bright Lady who was supporting him so that he would not fall and at the same time She was telling him:

- Do not fear... I am holding you firmly... go on...

As Father George was shaking with holy emotion, he entered the Holy Altar with Her. She closed the holy doors on the Beautiful Gate and gave him the censer in order to cense the Precious Gifts when they were placed on the Holy Altar.

The small grandson was watching everything that was going on in astonishment, speechless, and dazzled by the radiance of That majestic Lady. His soul -something that he will never forget- was filled with holy admiration and awe. However, he had a hard time understanding how the censer that he was holding was found in the hands of That all-bright Lady, of the Most Holy Theotokos, the Queen of the Heavens!

When the small boy came round he saw his grandfather crying. In every petition, proclamation and Prayer, he constantly repeated the word "Panaia mou" (my All-Holy).

"Help us, save us, have mercy on us... Panaia mou."

"An Angel of peace... Panaia mou."

"Through the mercies... Panaia moy."

"It is meet and right to hymn Thee... Panaia mou."

He continued to repeat the words Panaia mou in the Sanctification of the Precious Gifts. Particularly, with the words "Especially for our All-Holy (Panagia)...", sobbing, a lot of tearing, and saying "Panaia mou..." many times. This went on until the Divine Liturgy was completed.

Following the Dismissal of the Holy Chalice, he told his grandson:

- You will not tell anyone what you saw and heard... no one, for Panaia will cut your tongue..."

During the years of German occupation (1941-1944) the All-Holy (Pagiania) reappeared to Father George in order to help and support him -on Christmas day- two years before his death.

Since then Father George would murmur the words "Panaia mou" day and night. His co-villagers, who at the same time were his reasonable flock, used to "tease" him with this expression kind-heartedly.

He reposed in a blessed way. One morning when he felt ill, his son (the father of the person who had gone for confession) opened the door and saw him kneeling on both and his elderly arms raised and as he was immersed in a supernatural light he was mumbling:

- Panaia mou... Panaia mou... Panaia mou, I'm coming...

The One Whose name never ceased to be uttered with his lips and hear, received his soul.[1]

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[1] Personal notes

The **Anonymous Hesychast** also talks about the Great Entrance:

108. "Once during the Divine Liturgy, when I placed the Holy Diskos on my head and said: "In peace lift up your hands unto the holies", my heart was immediately filled with rejoicing and ineftable spiritual joy.

And taking the Holy Chalice I said: "God hath gone up in jubilation; the Lord with the voice of the trumpet" and continued by saying the word: "Dynamis (= with strength). Holy God..." When I pronounced the word "GOD" an ineneftable joy spread through my whole body and as my heart was feeling great joy and compunction it started leaping in a heavenly, inconceivable way...

As I was making the first two steps in order to start the Great Entrance and exit the north Gate, I see... -Oh! miracle, oh! Such is Your infinite forbearance, Lord!- myself being consumed by burning flames... from head to toe, the vestments and the Precious Gifts... everything was like burning red charcoal! The flames, in fact, which had surrounded me were rising, like burning tongues, an inch above my head, without burning me...

Strange flames... at times bright, clear, all-bright, and at times like a deep-red fire of coals... Always this fire of coals however was clear, ineftable, indescribable, glowing, filling me with joy and the dew of heaven... A fire that was cool!

(Then I was informed through the Holy Spirit how the three Young Lads were in the furnace of a real fire without the fire touching them. They were in the fire and were not burning... Not even a hair of theirs was burnt!)

Thus, the Anonymous Hesychast experienced something similar. He also was in the fire that did not inflame him and did not even consume his vestments. He was all a burning flame together with the Precious Gifts, but an all-bright, uncreated, unwaning light.

In this state, the Anonymous yet pure Priest, made the Great Entrance with a great deal of force and toil. Psychosomatically, if I may say so, he really experienced that which is said by the infallible sacred word of the Prophet and Psalter: Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire".

Since then I understood, says the Anonymous Hesychast, that during the Divine Worship the soul and spirit of the worthy Celebrant - Priests of the Most High, is a flame of fire, a spiritual fire, which makes them shine with divine light!"[1]

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[1] Anonymous Hesychast, *Niptiki Theoria* (*Contemplating Watchfulness)*, Sermon 18th, ibid, p.222

If the eyes of our soul open - even for a second - during the Great Entrance and see the sacred splendour and are in fact able to see, according to Christ's Grace, that which occurs during the Divine Liturgy, then our physical eyes will blur from the many tears which will wet our faces with great compunction. Various voices will come from within our hurting chest, which will say approximately all that which is described by the **Anonymous Hesychast:**

"Receive, Lord, these humble tears, as You are passing before me bearing the Cross, like the myrrh of the Myrrh-bearing Women, with which they sprinkled Your Most Immaculate Body in tears ...

Receive, Lord, these orphan tears like the myrrh whose pleasing odour is pouring with full strength and with which the sinful woman anointed You and then wiped Your All-Pure feet with her rich hair...

Let my sinful soul hear Your Voice saying: "Your sins, which are many, are forgiven, for you loved much... for you loved much!"

Make, Lord, my heart's hurting sighs acceptable together with my tears, as you accepted that widow's two pennies, whom You blessed, for with two pennies she gained Your Kingdom of Heaven...

Receive, Lord, my tears of repentance, like the thief's voice on the cross and make me a citizen and inheritor of Your Kingdom...

My Lord and Savior, may these few tears of mine which, however, come from the depths of my contrite heart, become the spiritual betrothal of Your Kingdom."[1]

But the tears of those who are unworthy and sinful are different from the tears of the worthy and holy priests as well as of those God-reverent Christians, who by being fully aware are partakers of the immaculate Mysteries. These second tears are compared to the tears of the Theotokos (Panagia) and Saint John's, who was the beloved Disciple under the Cross.

• The process of carrying the Precious Gifts

♦ First symbolism: the triumphant journey and entrance of the Lord in the Holy City of Jerusalem, where "He is about to be crucified for the salvation of the world".

During the Small Entrance the priest covers his face with the holy Gospel book: Christ is coming to proclaim his Word and the candle-bearer that precedes, is the Honorable Forerunner. During the Great Entrance the Priest covers his face with the offered Gifts: Christ is coming in order to be sacrificed.

"The Priest is approaching the Gifts (in the Holy Prothesis) and after lifting them to where his head is with great modesty, he exits. And as he is holding them he takes them to the Table of Offerings, carrying them about

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[1] Anonymous Hesychast, *Niptiki Theoria*...., ibid p.214-215

intentionally inside the Church Temple among the Christian church goers slowly-slowly, step by step, with great modesty. The faithful are chanting and fall before the priest's feet with respect and reverence. And he proceeds accompanied by candlesticks and incenses. And thus, he enters the Altar".[1]

Saint Germanos of Constantinople writes that the carrying of the Precious Gifts from the Table of Offerings is the «ἡ τούτων πρός τό θυσιαστήριον εἴσοδος, καί τό Χερουβικόν τήν ἀπό Βηθανίας πρός Ἱερουσαλήμ δηλοῖ τοῦ Κυρίου εἰσέλευσιν».[2] That is to say, the King of kings from Bethany enters the Holy City of Jerusalem. The minister becomes the young donkey on which no passion has sat and is therefore made worthy to carry Christ the King on his back.

The faithful receive Christ with hymns and branches, which spiritually signify the souls that have been cleansed: "With branches our souls having been spiritually cleansed, like other children let us faithfully praise Christ in loud voices crying out to the Master: blessed is He Who is coming in the name of the Lord".

♦ **Second symbolism: Christ's journey of martyrdom from the Praetorium to Golgotha.**

♦ **Third symbolism: The representation of the Lord's Burial. It is the journeying from the Unnailing to the Tomb.**

Parenthetically we mention that in the conch of the Holy Prothesis (Table of Offerings- Oblation) either the Cave of Bethlehem is being depicted in iconography, therefore the holy Veils, with which we cover the Precious Gifts, symbolize the layers of cloth with which the Divine Infant was wrapped and covered. Or, the "Extreme Humility" is depicted in iconography. Here the Lord is depicted in an upright stance, He is up to the waist in the Tomb with His hands tied and between them the reed, and with the crown of thorns on His Head, while the Holy Cross, a symbol of His Sacrifice, is behind Him.

When the Holy Proskomedia is being performed, we take the prosphoron (=liturgical bread) from which the Lamb of God will be extracted, and we say three times: "In remembrance of the Lord and God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen", according to what the Lord ordered: "do this in remembrance of Me". [3] That is why we say "in remembrance". And at the same time we bless the prosphoron by making the sign of the Cross with the Holy Lance.

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[1] Saint Nicholas. Cabasilas, PG 150,420B

[2] Saint Germanos of Constantinople, PG 98,420D

[3] Luk. 22,19

When the Celebrant Priest extracts the Lamb from the prosphoron, which is a symbol of the Holy Theotokos (Panagia), then we have a symbolic representation of our Lord Jesus Christ's Birth from the Theotokos' bosom. However, by cutting up the bread in order to extract the Lamb from the prosphoron, we have the symbolic representation of the Lord's Sacrifice on the Cross, while at the same time the Celebrant Priest says the prophetic words of Isaiah the Prophet: "he was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: who shall declare his generation?"[1] This action however is also a symbol of the Lord's departure from the world and His journey towards His Father through His Ascension.

The lance cuts up the bread in order to separate the Lamb from the main prosphoron and by being separated it is dedicated to God, so that it can be sanctified and become the Body of Christ. The Lord is also separated from the nature of men, "that he was cut out of the land of the living..." and is led to the Cross like a sheep to the slaughter. (That is when the Lamb is placed on the holy Diskos.) At that moment the cave of Bethlehem becomes Golgotha.

Next, the Celebrant Priest cross-wise cuts on the bottom side of the Lamb saying: "The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world is being sacrificed..." and the words: "Through your crucifixion, Christ, the tyranny has been annihilated..." Afterwards, the Priest pierces, spears with the spear the right side of the Lamb, saying: "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water ..."[2]

All of this reminds us of the Passion, the Crucifixion and the Lord's Death. That is why, when we cover the Precious Gifts, the sacred Veils are transformed into shrouds and white linen of the Lord Jesus Christ's burial. Therefore, the Oblation is the symbolism of the Sacrifice on the Cross and Golgotha up to death as well...

With the words of the Cherubic Hymn **"that we may receive the King of all"** the Celebrant of the Most High or the others also, if two or three priests are serving the Liturgy they are being transformed into Nicodemus and Joseph from Arimathea, who realise the Unnailing and the burial of the all-immaculate and most undefiled Body of Jesus. The faithful on the other hand, represent the Myrrh-bearing women and John the Evangelist.

According to the ancient liturgical rubrics the "Aer" was not placed either on the deacon's or the priest's shoulders, but two deacons, one on the right and one on the left, would hold it over the priest who was carrying the Precious Gifts, spread up high, like sepulchre. Thus, it is called by **Saint Symeon of Thessalonica** the "Aer" "Epitaphion". During that era, represen-

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[1] Is. 53,7

[2] Jn. 19,34

tations from the Passion, the Unnailing and the Lord's Burial were embroidered with a golden thread on the "Aer".[1]

However, there is proof that the journey of the Unnailing and Burial of the Lord exists with the troparion that is said by the priest even to this day as soon as he places the Precious Gifts on the Holy Table, and particularly on the Antimension which is spread open: **"The noble Joseph, when he had taken down Thine immaculate Body from the tree, wrapped It in pure linen and spices and, sorrowing, placed it in a new tomb"**.

And the Beautiful Gate immediately closes. The closing of the Gate signifies the stone, with which the guards secured and sealed the Tomb of the Lord, something that unfortunately has been abolished.

♦ **Fourth symbolism: Saint Symeon of Thessalonica** says that the Great Entrance depicts **the Second Coming of Christ.**

The Second Coming of Christ, as the Righteous Judge, will take place in great glory among infinite and myriad of Angels, Archangels and the other celestial, incorporeal, bodiless Powers. A fearful Judgment throne will be set up and the books of life of each one of us individually will be opened.

We see all these being depicted in the splendour of the Great Entrance, especially when the Divine Liturgy is being served by an archpriest and a large number of priests and deacons. Then the archpriest's omophorion (=wider, outer Episcopal stole), who precedes the whole procession of the Great Entrance, is not the lost sheep, but the Sign of the Cross, the Sign which, according to the Holy Scripture, will precede the Lord's appearance during His Second fearful Coming: "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven",[2] that is to say, the Cross of the Lord.

What follows are the candlesticks, the hexapteryga and the incenses of the deacons, who represent the heavenly Angelic hosts which also escort the coming Jesus Christ as Judge.

During the Great Entrance, our Lord Jesus Christ like heavenly Bread on the holy Diskos, that is to say in heaven, along with the Holy Chalice of the never-ending joy, is before us! Christ, the heavenly Bread, the active and unconsumed joy, is the Slaughtered Lamb, who will appear before the whole world, "judging the quick and the dead".[3]

And on the one hand, the ungodly, the evildoers and blasphemous and tough and proud and above all the unrepentant, in fear and terror will see Him, Whom they pierced and fought and rejected and crucified with their sins in their hearts.

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[1] Saint Symeon of Thessalonica, *Apanta*, ibid, p.328

[2] Mat. 24,30 [3] II Tim. 4,1

On the other, the ones who had faith, the Confessors, the Martyrs, the Righteous and all those who in a spirit of repentance hoped in God's mercy will also see His most holy wounds. They will rejoice, they will leap from the taste of sacred Blessedness, for through His wounds on the Cross we were all cured and saved. "By his bruise we were healed".[1]

Therefore, when the Precious Gifts pass in front of us, we ought to beseech our Saviour Jesus Christ in a noetic way saying: "Lord, Lord do not forsake me in Your Second Coming, but make me as one of thy hired servants".[2]

• The thief's cry

The cry "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom",[3] is included in those words that are said by the Priest, during the modest Great Entrance of the "Holies": **"May the Lord God remember all of you in his kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages"**.

We recall this grateful thief during this sacred moment in the Divine Liturgy and we also repeat through the deacon or the priest his most emotional and devout prayer and cry. Thus, the grateful thief is presented and manifested spiritually as an example in the ages of ages; an example of faith and true repentance.

According to Tradition, the name of the thief was Dysmas. In his life he was a murderer and a criminal. He together with another criminal, were crucified on Golgotha along with the Lord of Glory. And under the Cross the scribes and the pharisees, the nobles and the ungrateful crowd together with the two criminals who were crucified with Him "reviled Him". Therefore, it seems that the thief who was on the right of the Lord would have most probably met, seen or heard the Lord, His miracles and teaching. At one point, and especially after the cry of Christ "Father, forgive them..." his heart was shocked and his good purpose was illumined, so that he started being freed within him from the pressure of the old person. He recognized in Jesus Christ's Person His Divinity and asked for His mercy, with that great cry, which since then has shocked the souls of all the sinful of all centuries: **"Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom"**. The Celebrant Priest repeats the cry of this grateful thief during the Great Entrance.

• Christ's welcoming by the faithful.

The Cherubic hymn, the candlesticks, the hexapteryga, the incense, the psalms, all these help us experience the event of the coming of Christ. They help us in living "the Entrance of all the Saints and Righteous (who are placed on the holy Diskos, together with the Angelic orders) who are co-enter-

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[1] Is. 53,5 [2] Luk. 15,19 [3] Luk. 23,42

ing with Him, Who from the beginning has been the Holy of Holies, while the Cherubic powers and Angelic hosts are preceding and as invisible, bodiless choruses and incorporeal Angelic orders, are running forward, praising and escorting before Christ the great King, Who is coming for the mystical Sacrifice."[1] As **Saint Germanos A´ of Constantinople** told us.

The Great Entrance is one of the most distinguished moments of the Divine Liturgy. As the celebrant is making his way, the faithful bow down making the sign of the Cross, the mothers are covering the floor with clothes of the sick or they are laying their feeble children on the floor, so that the priest may pass over them with the Holies. Many times they lay down those who are demon-possessed or ill with incurable diseases.

On the other hand, **Saint Nicholas Cabasilas** says the following which is noteworthy: "During the Great Entrance, when the priest is making his way holding the Holies in his hands, we should fall down on our knees before the priest, venerate and ask him to remember us in the prayers that follow. For, there isn't a more powerful way to beseech, which is able to give certain hope, from this fearful Sacrifice, which has freely cleansed all ungodliness and lawlessness of the world."[2] He stresses that during the Great Entrance the Christians should kneel and does not distinguish whether it is on a Sunday, on a feast or week day. Of course, the Precious Gifts have not been sanctified into Body and Blood, but they are "their replicas" and they must be venerated.

What we are saying not that the 20th Canon of the First Ecumenical Synod should be abolished nor that we are opposed to this Canon. However, we realize, if we study the **20th Chapter from the Acts**, that the holy Apostle Paul together with the presbyters of Ephesus fell on their knees and prayed all together, during the period of time before Pentecost. "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all".[3]

We believe that during certain sacred moments in the Divine Liturgy, kneeling must not be a mere pseudo-reverence that is typical "to be seen of men", but the result of contrition and devoutness. There are priests who during the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts are overcome by holy awe and great fear and their contrition is so great that they kneel down crying and beseeching for God's mercy.

Personally, during the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts on a Sunday (excluding the Easter Week) we have seen archpriests and priests kneel, even on Mount Athos (or Holy Mountain) and in many Monasteries here in the world. We believe that the Celebrant Priest's or the faithful Christian's contrite and hurting or even loving soul expresses a certain idiosyncrasy

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[1] Saint Germanos A of Constantinople, P.G. 98,420D

[2] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, Thessalonica 1991², p.85

[3] Acts 20,36

during that sacred moment when they kneel down in the Great Entrance and when the words "Thine own of Thine own" are proclaimed.

So, under these psychosomatic circumstances that have been experienced, the kneeling on Sunday does not abolish the 20th Canon of the A' (First) Ecumenical Synod nor does it show disrespect towards it.

And something else, known to all Selebrants of the Most High: During the ordination of a Priest, even if it is on a Sunday any Sunday EVERYBODY KNEELS.

Thus, with the passage of time there is a new act of life in Divine Worship, which - I repeat - should depend altogether on the faithful Christian's psychological state. That is, we do not show disrespect towards the Holy Canons but the pain, contrition, compunction, awe, and fear many times makes one of the faithful in the Church or the Celebrant Priest want to kneel during both of these liturgical moments of Divine Worship!

One manuscript of Megistis Lavras in Mount Athos writes the following: Christ Who is escorted by the Angelic hosts is entering the Holy City, in order to serve the most reverent Mystery of His Sacrifice. He is entering the Holy of Holies holding our life, the life of the whole universe in his immaculate hands. The Holy Gifts, which the priest has elevated, is man and the whole world, who return to God through Christ.

Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite in his sermon about the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos, writes that the Entrance of the Lady Theotokos in the "Holy of Holies is the world's return to God".[1] Man's return and that of the whole world to the Triune God and Christ the Saviour, takes place during the Great Entrance.

• Placing the Precious Gifts on the Holy Altar Table and also on the Antiminsion which is spread out.

The Celebrant Priest says the following troparion as he is placing the Holy Cup and the Holy Diskos on the Holy Table:

"The noble Joseph, when he had taken down thine immaculate body from the tree, wrapped it in pure linen and spices and, sorrowing, placed it in a new tomb".

While the deacon (if there is one) says: **"Do Good, Bishop"**.

And the priest censes the "Holies", saying the last verse of the 50th Psalm for the third time: **"Then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar"**.

Saint Theodore Andidon mentions the following: "Placing the Holies on the Holy Table imitates the moment when the upper room was prepared

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[1] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*, (a commentary), ibid...p.227

the night of the Mystic Supper and a while later the elevation of the Lord on the Cross, His Burial, His Resurrection and Ascension".[1]

Saint Germanos A΄ of Constantinople writes that the holy Diskos "is a pre-figuration of Joseph's and Nikodemus hands, the ones who buried Christ". The "Aer", which is the big veil, with which the Priest covers the Holy Gifts, symbolizes the white linen with which Joseph enwrapped the Body of Christ, while the incense reminds us of the aromas. Finally, the Beautiful Gate closes; this is an action that symbolizes the sealing of the Tomb of Christ by the soldiers.[2]

Therefore, we have concluded that which refers to the **Great Entrance**.

As we recap the Great Entrance we notice the following:

- **First:** The process of carrying the Holy Gifts from the Holy Prothesis (Table of Offerings), via the Holy Church Temple, to the Holy Table.
- **Second:** The thief's cry on the cross: "May the Lord God remember all of you in His kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages", instead of "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom".
- **Third:** The reception of the Holy Gifts by the Church goers, and
- **Fourth:** The process of placing the Holy Gifts on the Holy Table.

As far as the first point is concerned, in other words **the process of carrying the Holy Gifts** from the Holy Prothesis via the Church Temple to the Altar, the Fathers make out **four symbolisms**:

- **The first one** refers to the Lord's triumphant journey and entrance to the city of Jerusalem, where "He is about to be crucified for the salvation of the world".
- **The second one** refers to the journey of martyrdom from the Praetorium to the dreadful Golgotha.
- **The third** to the journey from the Unnailing until the empty tomb, where the Lord was buried.
- And **the fourth** symbolism refers to Christ's Second Coming.

109. There is a wonderful story from the life of Saint Onoufrios, who our Church commemorates on the 12th of June:

When he was very young, he became part of a Coenobium, how this happened remains a mystery. When he became an adult he went to the desert, where he lived for 60 years without seeing anyone.

He was nude, however his long beard, which reached to the ground, and his hair as well as his body's large hair covered his whole body.

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[1] Saint Theodore of Andidon, P.G. 140,421C

[2] Saint German A of Constantinople, P.G. 98,421D

This great Saint was discovered by Saint Pafnoutios, to whom the former told his holy life in the desert.

So, when he was very young, 5-6 years old, and used to live in the Coenobium, the following took place: As he was younger he used to eat more frequently compared to the other fathers. When he was hungry he would run to the person in charge of the refectory and ask him for bread, olives, fruit... One day, however, the person in charge noticed that he took bread more often and would then disappear.

- He must be feeding some kind of animal, he thought.

This continued for a week.

- The person in charge of the refectory told himself: 'Let me go and see where he takes what I give him'.

Indeed, he followed the young boy and saw him entering the Monastery's Katholicon and the door closing behind him.

He ran quickly towards the window and his eyes opened wide with what he saw... The small boy was chatting with Baby Jesus, Who was in the arms of the Holy Theotokos, on the Iconostasis (icon screen between the sanctuary and the nave)!

- I brought You some bread today as well, he would tell little Jesus, since no one feeds You... not even Your Mother...

And he held out his hand and gave Him a piece of bread...

And the Lord Jesus Christ, Who was depicted as a little child in the holy icon, held out His hand, took the bread...and, as He held His hand back together with the bread he disappeared inside the icon!...

Then, immediately the person in charge of the refectory ran to the Abbot full of astonishment and awe and told him what had happened. Then the Abbot ordered him not to give the child any bread, nevertheless, when he would ask for it in a pleading way, they should tell him:

- You should go and ask bread from Him, Whom you used to feed until yesterday.

The following day, after little Onoufrios saw that they were not giving him any bread but instead they were sending him to ask from Him, Whom he had been feeding up to that day, he ran to the Church and going in front of the icon he told little Christ:

- My little Christ, they are not giving me any bread and they told me to tell You to give me from Yours. Now, where will You be able to find it, I do not know! And - what wonder! - Baby Jesus held out His little hand from His Most Holy (Panagia) Mother's arms and gave him an enormous loaf of bread, so big that it could not be lifted by the small boy! It gave off such a sweet fragrance that this heavenly aroma spread not only inside the Church Temple, but also throughout the whole monastery and the surrounding area.

Startled and dazzled by the occurrences, the monks saw the five year-old Onoufrios taking that enormous bread out, with great diffi-

culty. Two monks ran to help but the bread was extremely heavy! They ate for many days, they were being satiated, but the heavenly bread was and remained unconsumed. It is that which the Church says with great certainty during the Divine Worship: "Which is always eaten but never consumed".

From then on they revered little Onoufrios greatly, for they knew that as he got older his holiness would also become greater. He would become a great Saint... and so it happened...

Saint Onoufrios would be fed with the same heavenly bread when he lived in the desert for sixty consecutive years.[1]

However, we do not make reference to the manna, which God threw from the sky, in order to feed the Jews in the desert, nor do we make reference to the heavenly bread with which the Lord preserved His Saints in the deserts, the caves and in the clefts of the earth, but to the most holy Bread - Christ, that is, His Precious Body and Blood. We make reference to the Divine Worship, through which the Body and the Blood of Christ is being offered "unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting".

When the priest serves the liturgy along with the deacon, he tells him immediately after the Holy Gifts have been censed: **"Remember me, brother and concelebrant"**.

On the other hand, the deacon responds: **"May the Lord God remember thy priesthood in his kingdom always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages"**.

Next, the deacon bows his head, leaning it on the Holy Table and saying: **"Pray for me, Holy Master".**

And the priest answers: **"May the Holy Spirit descend upon thee, and the power of the Most High overshadow thee"**. (These are the exact words that Archangel Gabriel told the Theotokos (Panagia) during the Annunciation).

Then, the deacon: **"May the same Spirit serve with us all the days of our life. Remember me, Holy Master"**.

And the priest: **"The Lord God remember thee (you) in his kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages"**.

The deacon: **"Amen"**.

He kisses the priest's hand as well as the Holy Table, exits the sanctuary through the north door. Standing at his place on the solea (elevated area at the eastern-most end of the nave running the length of the iconostasis), in order to intone the petitions of **"the Litany of supplication"**.

Both the deacon and the priest are human. Both of them have the same weaknesses, the weaknesses of human nature. Thus, after the deacon receives the Celebrant Priest's blessing that the Holy Spirit may overshadow him

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[1] Paschos P.V., *The desert within*, Athens 1995, p.89

with Its Grace, he blesses back the celebrant: "May this Spirit concelebrate with us..."For the Comforter "also helpeth our infirmities" and "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered".[1]

Our prayers are also His gift. We are not in a position to pray without the help and power of the All-Holy Spirit. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit".[2] So, why are you boasting about saying the Jesus' Prayer with the prayer rope? You pray with the prayer rope with the power of the All-Holy God and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, you make the sign of the Cross, you do your prayer, you read the Salutations, the Compline, the Supplication or the Midnight Office. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit to come to Church and attend its services.

And during the Divine Worship the Comforter concelebrates with the Celebrant Priest revealing Christ to the faithful. This All-Holy Spirit guides and leads all of us by the hand, with wisdom, power, understanding, illumination, in fear, "into the face to face perfect knowledge and initiation of the great God and Saviour of all Christ, **Saint Basil the Great** tells us. And continues: Through the Holy Spirit our restoration in Paradise; our ascension and entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven; the renewal to the adoption; the boldness to call God our Father... to beseech, supplicate, to pray, to give thanks, to glorify... Everything is realised through the All Holy Spirit. Above all, the Change of the Precious Gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ is made possible through the Holy Spirit...[3]

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[1] Rom. 8,26

[2] I Cor. 12,3

[3] Saint Basil the Great, Sermon E, LGFCA 52,260

4. THE LITANY OF SUPPLICATION

If there isn't a deacon, **"the Litany of Supplication"** immediately follows the censing of the Holy Gifts which is intoned by the Celebrant Priest.

These petitions are called **"the Litany of Supplication"**, for they begin with the phrase **"let us complete our prayer unto the Lord"**.

Seven new petitions complete the supplications, which until now were made during the sacred service of the Divine Liturgy.

- The first supplication refers to the Precious Gifts: **"For the precious gifts now set forth, let us pray to the Lord"**. That is to say, "Let us pray for the Precious Gifts which we have brought and placed on the Holy Table".

The next petitions follow in order:

- **"For this holy house..."**
- **"For our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger and necessity..."**
- **"Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God..."**
- **"That the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful and sinless..."**
- **"An angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies..."**
- **"Pardon and forgiveness of our sins and transgressions..."**
- **"All things good and profitable for our souls and peace for the world..."**
- **"That we may complete the remaining time of our life in peace and repentance..."**
- **"A Christian ending to our life, painless, blameless, peaceful and a good defence before the fearful judgment seat of Christ, let us ask of".**

In every single petition the people through the holy chanters respond: **"Grant this, O Lord"**. Which means, Lord, give us what we ask of You.

♦ "FOR THE PRECIOUS GIFTS, NOW SET FORTH..."

When the Precious Gifts are placed on the Holy Table, our hearts should be clean from any trace of maliciousness, rancour, vengefulness, indiffer-

ence towards all the people in general, according to the Lord's words: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee..."[1] That is to say that, without forgiveness, without love working, the offering of gifts should not take place. Forbearance, goodness, forgiveness of all from the depths of one's soul, confession, a contrite heart, and prayer, are the most essential requirements, for the offering of the Precious Gifts for the Divine Liturgy. So, you should have a heart that is clean, pure, humble, and contrite when you take the liturgical bread to the Church Temple.

The following three petitions have been previously analysed.

♦ "THAT THE WHOLE DAY, MAY BE PERFECT, HOLY, PEACEFUL AND SINLESS, LET US ASK OF THE LORD"

With this petition we ask for four things: That every day of our life may be perfect, holy, peaceful and sinless.

Nevertheless, **what do we mean by the word day?**

In the **Holly Scripture** we encounter the word **"day"** with a large number of connotations: As a simple day, as a day of revenge, as a day of temptation, as an evil day, as a day of sorrow, as a day of the Second Coming of the Lord. All the days belong to God and thus they are blessed. However, they are transformed into bad days of temptation and sorrow from our multiple passions, from the devil's malice and envy, from the natural elements and from God's good instruction, Who "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth".[2]

Every day we are surrounded by many temptations - interior and exterior - and "that we go in the midst of snares"[3], as Saint Anthony the Great saw in a divine vision. He saw the earth spread out, filled with traps. Traps! Traps! And was horrified and scared. Traps in the cities, traps in the villages. Traps in the streets and on buses. Traps in our homes coming from our television sets. Traps coming from our children's disobedience. Traps among friends and so-called friends. Traps here and there, traps everywhere, traps even in the desert! That is why we cry out to God and beseech for His mercy, saying: "and lead us not into temptation";[4] temptation of this present day and life, but also the last temptation, that of the Coming Judgment.

♦ "Perfect"

What does the word **"perfect"** mean to us? It means putting into practice the commandment "be ye therefore perfect"[5]. In other words, may we spend our day as perfect and well-rounded Christians; young and old, men

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[1] Mat. 5,23 [2] I Tim. 2,4 [3] Eccles. 9,12 [4] Mat. 6,13 [5] Mat. 5,48

and women, married and single, monks, priests, of every rank, everyone. That is, to bring our deed on earth, our destination to a perfect end.

♦ "Holy"

"Holy" is a synonym of **"perfect"** for holiness and perfection are the most precious gifts, towards which every faithful striving Christian must incline. "Holy day" means a day that is separated from sin, therefore pure, entirely clean, all-pure, and unblemished. Our Lord Jesus Christ said to all of us: "Be ye holy; for I am holy."[1]

So, each day separately is sanctified only when our life is clean and pure. That is why our thoughts should also be holy, pure and our desires, all of them together should form sanctified senses. In addition, our language ought to be holy and wise. Our words, our discussions and our advice ought to be holy and clean. When our words and actions are characterized by sense, wisdom and holiness, then our whole life in each and every day separately is **"holy"** and **"perfect"**.

♦ "Peaceful"

Every Christian who is peaceful is also at peace with himself and the others. Every peacemaker is called and is in fact God's real child, according to "blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God".[2] However, the Lord in the Holy Bible is also called "prince of peace". Thus, wherever there is peace and calmness within and a heart that thirsts for the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding",[3] there shall the Master of peace, our Lord Jesus Christ reign.

♦ "Sinless"

A soul that is perfect, holy and peaceful, does not allow sin to enter, for sin flees, like darkness when light comes along.

However, sinlessness is exclusively God's feature: "For you only exist without sin". The fact that through its liturgies, Mother Church asks that our day may be **"sinless"** shows how much God hates sin. Sin includes hell, "for the wages of sin is death".[4]

What do we need in order to be saved from the assault of sin?

First of all and above all we need **WATCHFULNESS**. Watchfulness in thought, the intellect, the mind. For all sin and crime, all transgression and all the passions, originate from the mind. If we are prudent and dismiss the first impression, the first assault, the first bad thought, we will never sin. Thus, my advice is: **"NEVER SPEAK WITH YOUR MIND"**. Not only in terms of prayer, but also especially in terms of sin.

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[1] Pet. 1,16 [2] Mat. 5,9 [3] Phil. 4,7 [4] Rom. 6,23

However, since we are spiritually weak and temptation comes full force in order to sway us into trouble, we are in need of God's help. Woe to him who considers himself a powerful and strong character. He is in danger of falling more quickly. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall".[1] Therefore, let us be watchful. We are all weak. In this life we all walk on a tightrope. Only God's help can support us. Only His help can keep us going.

There are dreadful moments in one's life when everything collapses spiritually but the divine help of the all-powerful Name of the Lord saves those who call upon God day and night, so that our day may be **"perfect, holy, peaceful and sinless"**.

110. There once lived in a town of Crete near a place called Kaloi Limenes a farmer with a clever and cultivated spirit who was born and brought up honever in the well-known heresies of the time. Yet, he was restless and once in a while used to wonder:

"Am I in the right path? Or am I making a mistake and thus drowning along with my wife and children? Oh, my God, send me an Angel of Yours, if You have one and if they exist, that they may lead me to the right..." And again "Oh, my God..." and "oh, my God..." He wondered for years...

Once an Orthodox Deacon passed by his vineyard. He approached him and started a conversation that consisted of many questions and answers. The wine-grower was captivated by the discussion. It was passed the hour and the wealthy farmer invited the Deacon to his place.

When they arrived home, the Deacon started talking about the Orthodox faith. The whole family was hanging on from his every word.

The whole night he was talking to them about the Lord, His incarnation as God-Man, about Worship, the Mysteries, death, about the Kingdom of Heaven, the Judgment of God and about so many other matters pertaining to our faith.

No one was tired. Everyone was captivated by his words, which were as sweet as honey. Their hearts warmed, their urge for the true faith had been lit up. Their eyes opened, they were illumined by the light of the Orthodox faith...

In the morning all of them together, as much as that was possible during that time, wanted to be baptised. The Deacon did not waste time. He took the wine-grower with him and went to the local bishop. The bishop received them and asked the Deacon who he was, where he came from and where he is heading. The Deacon stood up and responded:

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[1] I Cor. 10,12

- I come from Jerusalem. I am an Archdeacon of the Great Archpriest and I am going to Athens for Church matters of the Great Archpriest. But due to strong winds and stormy seas, we harboured here, in the so-called Kaloi Limenes. However, today I come to you to plead you for this man and his family, whose members I catechised appropriately all night in the streams of Orthodoxy, that he may be baptised.

After the bishop heard that he was an Archdeacon of the Great Church of Christ in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, he did not ask him anything else, he only told him to remain a guest, until the weather changed, and asked him the following day, Friday, to take part in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, for it was Great Lent. At the same time he reassured him that catechism would continue for a few more days and at Easter he would baptise the farmer and his family.

Indeed, the next day the Presanctified Divine Liturgy was celebrated. During the Great Entrance the Deacon was given the Holy Diskos with the Most Holy Body of the Lord, to hold and carry silently.

The unknown Archdeacon took It, but was trembling a great deal. In a state of shock almost He carried the Body of Christ. With great difficulty, holy awe and fear, he managed to step into the Holy Bema.

Everyone noticed it and were very impressed. The bishop and the priest and the large number of Christians saw and sensed that the Archdeacon's fear was not an ordinary kind of fear. This otherworldly and mysterious attitude was evident also during Holy Communion.

After the Divine Liturgy had come to an end the bishop asked the Archdeacon whether he was ill or whether he had some kind of peculiar disease.

And the Archdeacon's response:

- Indeed. Holy bishop, I am consumed by an illness, which cannot be cured by anyone. As many times as I perform the Divine and dreadful Mystagogy and take the Precious and All-Holy Body of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ in my hands, I feel that my strength is insufficient to carry such a big weight, that is why, I am unable to walk freely without bending, that is, without being shocked by terror.

And he added in the same exact words:

- And who is able, holy bishop, from those who are knowledgeable of the matter of the Divine Service, to hold in one's hands "Him Who is not to be contained"? Reinforcing our weakness, our Lord Jesus Christ's indulgence, the Archdeacon continued, makes the heavy - weighted light - weighted and the impossible possible. Yet, blessed is he, Holy Bishop, who is made worthy to serve this great Mystery in which the heavenly Angels and all the Powers who serve in the glory of heaven are present in fear and awe.

When he finished, the Holy Deacon was in a state of agitation. The entire Holy Bema was illumined by heavenly light. The Archdeacon was also illumined and with his voice having undergone a strange change, he was heard to say in a heavenly voice:

- I am one of the liturgical spirits, which are sent "to serve... those who are to inherit salvation in the future". I am the Angel, sent to Cornelius the centurion, a devout man with the fear of God as well as to all his household, who would supplicate God all the time and doing many charities among the people. I am an Angel from the Angelic Order, which offers the prayers of those "who want to be saved" to the heavenly Throne of Christ the Saviour.

When the farmer, whom I handed over to you yesterday, would constantly prayed asking God to baptise him and his family, he would ask of Him to be shown the true faith, so that he could venerate God knowingly. And I was the one who offered his prayer before God. God sent me in order to lead him in the right path and having accomplished my mission I am going back to where I came from.

When the archpriest and the others heard all this, they were so shaken that they fell on the floor of the Holy Bema with their faces. However, the Angel told them:

- Do not be afraid, but bless and venerate God unto all the ages. I appeared to you without having eaten or drunk, only you see me like in a vision. However, none of those things happened. And now confess to God, for I am ascending to Him Who sent me.

When they stood up they did not see anyone. They glorified God for His wondrous works and for the apparition of the Lord's Angel to them who are unworthy!

The farmer who was observing that which took place during the Pre-sanctified Worship outside the Church, from an open window, in a strange and inexplicable way heard and saw all that which took place and everything that was said by the Lord's Angel with the person of the Archdeacon and said in a loud voice:

- Now I know that the Lord God truly sent His Angel and took me away from the darkness of ignorance. Glory to You, King God All-Sovereign and Lover of mankind, that with the Angel's presence You made me, the sinner and former heretic, worthy to be resurrected along with my family from the death of sin. And now, Lord, illumine my mind and heart, so that I may praise You all the days of my life, crying just like your Heavenly Angels "Holy, Holy, Holy, thou art God, heaven and earth are full of thy glory".

When the farmer was baptised he was named Sergios.[1]

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[1] Personal notes.

♦ "AN ANGEL OF PEACE, A FAITHFUL GUIDE, A GUARDIAN OF OUR SOULS AND BODIES, LET US ASK OF THE LORD"

With this petition we ask God to send us every day a sleepless Guardian Angel of our souls and bodies. This personal Angel is at the same time "an Angel of peace and a faithful guide" in our life. He guides us to the enlightenment and the divine Knowledge of faith. He also takes our prayers and offers them to the heavenly Throne of the Lord and God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. He protects us from the "fiery darts of evil which are craftily thrown against us" and from life's temptations. That is why we call upon him every night during the Small Compline. During our spiritual struggles, our guardian angel battles with Satan so that our faith may be preserred and our souls may be harmless. **"Give not access to the evil demon to rule with his might this mortal body of mine, but hold me by my wretched, feeble hand; lead me in the path of salvation"**. The holy Angel carries the inner peace to our souls, which is indeed the most essential term of our salvation. He helps us fulfil our duties towards God and our fellow man. He protects us from peoples' malice. He sends messages to our soul, and to our mind and heart, urges and reminders of our Holy God.

During the time of our adoption, that is, when we were baptised in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, God granted us an Angel, just like the king assigns his heir adjutants. We are also God's heirs and inheritors!

The Guardian Angel of our soul up until the last minute of our life is interested in our salvation. If with sinful works, lack of repentance and hardheartedness, we move away from God's Grace, this means that we also move away from our Angel.

All the Angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation".[1]

"Angels are "incorporeal fire", clear spirits, with "perfect gifts" and capable of fixing their eyes on God in a way that is inconceivable to our minds, according to the assurance of our Lord Himself "that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father".[2] This is how our Guardian Angel is, thus every protected Christian ought to be[3] all-white and all-pure. Besides, "the pure in heart... shall see God"[4]

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[1] Hebr. 1,14

[2] Mat. 18,10

[3] Alexandra Nun, *The Angels* Elafos publ., Athens 1994, p.217

[4] Mat. 5,8

111. A priest was once observing the sky with astonishment and wonder.

- Why are you so spellbound? His family asked him.

- I can see, he said, various groups of Angels, who constantly lift the petitions of Christians to the throne of Christ the Saviour.

Most petitions are related to finding solutions to peoples' numerous troubles, like illnesses, handicaps, misery, famine, unemployment etc. Others deal with the ceasing of wars, bloodshed, crime and whatever morally bad reigns in the world. Others again are plenty of thanksgiving towards the God of love and others filled with heavenly doxologies for the immense spiritual wealth that their souls are provided with. However, the most glorious and light-bearing group of Angels is the one that carries along with the petitions, the burning tears of repentance... Those ascend like precious pearls that adorn the Lord's heavenly throne. These are the blessed souls, who primarily ask for "the Kingdom of God" with the cleansing of passions, the contrition of the heart, their union with God through Holy Communion, and the remission of their sins.[1]

Many of our petitions to God, Who is All-Good, through the Angels are made for material wealth not spiritual. It is good to ask of what is essential for our nourishment, our accommodation and work, however it would be incomparably superior to ask God that we never lack Divine Worship, holy Communion, holy Confession, the Gospel and a good Spiritual father-Confessor, after we have asked for the "Kingdom of God".

Yet, one thing is certain: All our petitions, thanksgiving, doxologies, and our sighs are taken by our soul's Guardian Angel before the throne of God.

♦ "PARDON AND FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS AND TRANSGRESSIONS..."

With this petition we request for two things: on the one hand forgiveness and on the other the remission of our sins and transgressions.

There is a difference in meaning as far as the term **"pardon"** and the term **"forgiveness"** is concerned. "Pardon" is given through prayer and supplication, however, "forgiveness" is provided only with repentance through the Mystery of Holy Confession. "Pardon" means sympathy towards our minor mistakes and God's leniency, until we go for Holy Confession. Whereas, "forgiveness" is forgiving, acquitting and the restoration of "adoption".

Moreover, there is a difference between **"transgression"** and **"sin"**. "Transgression" means a simple misdemeanour, which occurred mainly out of negligence or and carelessness. An insult towards God, yet not with bad intention. While "sin" is the evil action, the blasphemous word, the perverse

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[1] Personal notes.

thought, the wicked desire. It is the violation of the evangelical and sacred commandments, whether this is done with bad intention and wilfully, or whether it is done out of indifference and moral corruption. It is hell. Besides, "(for) the wages of sin is death".[1] "Sin is the transgression of the law"[2] and "all unrighteousness is sin",[3] the Evangelist of love informs us in his First Catholic Epistle. It is the power of evil, which lurks within us. It is our free objection and rebelling to the voice of God, which is heard either in us as the voice of conscience that is protesting for the evil doing, or through the sacred word. It is man's wilful action, which is against the will of our Holy God. Every person who commits a sin, repeats the action of Adam and Eve. And finally, it is man's conscientious and free disobedience, which alienates him from God.

I received a letter, which wrote the following:

112. "At the start of our century, a certain priest, who was lacking in faith, once during the Divine Liturgy gathered up the Holies and dropped all the Portions from the Holy Diskos inside the Holy Cup with the Muse. Therefore, it seems that his fingers had been "splashed" by the Lord's Blood, as he was dropping the portions of His Body inside the Holy Cup. A little bit absent-minded and indifferent as he was he wiped his hands on his phelonion (= a cape-like priestly garment).

It is well-known that the priest should normally wipe his hands very well on the large veil (Maktro), then wash them in the crucible and only then can the Holy Communion of the faithful follow.

When the priest took the Holy Cup in his hands and faced the people in order to say "In fear of God...", everyone in terror saw blood on his phelonion, where he had wiped his hands!!!

The people shouted in astonishment. He then turned back, placed the Holy Cup on the Holy Table in a state of terror and as if he were dumbfounded did not know what to do next. He took off his phelonion and hung it somewhere inside the Holy Bema.

Many days later, blood, an irrefutable witness of the fearsome Mystery and dreadful Sacrifice on Golgotha, was still on the phelonion. Crimson, real, thick, live blood!... Christ's Blood!...

The carelessness that we priests show during the service of the dreadful Mysteries reveals the lack of devoutness and reverence.

Lord, have mercy on us!"[4]

And of course, we need to be a lot more careful when the Christians receive Holy Communion. Fear and tremor! For it is a great pity if the pre-

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[1] Rom. 6,23 [2] I Jn. 3,4 [3] I Jn. 5,17

[4] Personal notes

cious Pearl of our Lord or a drop of His Most Holy Blood falls down. Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us sinful, careless and unworthy priests of Yours...

The worst expression of man's "sin" and his desertion from God is the pride and arrogance with which his life is characterised by.

There is also an immediate relation between sin and guilt. The phenomenon of guilt following a sinful act is catholic. We are so sinful that no one can ever remember when they started thinking and acting in a wicked and sinful way. Not only that. There is something a lot worse: When man examines himself carefully and with humility, he realizes that not only does he lack the strength and the ability to do good deeds, but he that also that he lives and breathes under a tremendous inclination and power, which urges him to act in an evil way and thus captivates him in self-interest, selfishness and pride.

Both the Divine revelation as well as the History of all people and all religions talk about guilt, which is experienced by all mortals, like the toughest reality. Sinfulness within us constantly creates an agitated conscience. The feeling of guilt often occupies a permanent position within us... - **But when?** - Every time we sin wilfully. And if by any chance the Celebrant Priest has committed deadly sins, for which he is deposed from Priesthood, how much greater is the feeling of guilt that burdens him for life!!! It is an unbearable weight on his chest. Sighs and cries of agony come out of his irreparably wounded conscience every day. Guilt becomes the permanent lodger of our soul... but what lodgers? Satanic masters, tyrannical, pitiless, merciless, inhumane.

So, the question is: **How will man be redeemed?**

A guilty conscience afflicts us, hurts us, torments us, troubles us. That is why the sinner asks the guilty conscience, through the mouth of Apostle Paul: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"[1]

Many, but very many, especially in the United States and Europe, take refuge in neuropsychiatrists, psychologists, but also in astrologists, witches, fortune tellers or in acquaintances, friends, and relatives, even in icons. Wherever they might take refuge to, they may be relieved temporarily, but redemption from guilt, no!!! An awful and ruthless law of conscience!

No man can enter the innermost depths of another person. Doctors may give pills, so that the patient, who is gripped by anxiety and guilt, can sleep; however, when he wakes up his guilt will wake up with him.

No one has the power or authority to enter the holy bema of other people's conscience, in order to relieve them from remorse. Not even time which subdues everything. With time as it passes and goes by, pain is alleviated, the wound is cured, temptation and setbacks are forgotten. Yet, remorse cannot be cured by time, nor can it make it go away. Only God can. And God

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[1] Rom. 7,24

offers redemption and remission through the Mystery of Holy Confession and Repentance through the Spiritual father's stole.

Forgiveness and remission are possible, for there has been and there is the work of Divine Dispensation for our salvation. God became man, He suffered, was crucified, buried, was resurrected from the dead, ascended in glory and built the Church with His most holy Blood. Thus, through the Church and its most holy Mysteries man is redeemed, saved...

113. Saint Paul the Simple once went to visit a monastery. It was on a Sunday. The monks gathered at the Church to attend the Divine Liturgy. Saint Paul stood in the corner where he observed, as he was unseen, the brethren who entered the Church one by one. He had the gift from God to see inside the human soul.

Most brethren had a cheerful countenance, which immediately indicated their inner state. Each one of them had his Guardian-Angel standing next to him radiating from joy. All of which was the result of holiness and progress made in virtue. Whenever Abba Paul saw all this he would thank God from the bottom of his heart.

In the end there was another late-comer monk. He was different from all the others. His face was dark and wild. He was agitated. He was followed by many demons who, each one separately, was trying to grab him to his side. All of them were bombarding his ears, his mind, his heart. The unfortunate one seemed lost. His Angel, sick at heart, followed him behind, with his head lowered. Something was keeping him from going closer.

The Saint gave off a big sigh. He cried with sympathy for the brother's troubled soul and started praying with the prayer rope.

The Divine Liturgy had been completed. The monks departed in order. The Saint looked again. Now they seemed brighter. Their Angels were glowing more than before! Abba Paul did not move from his seat at all. He was waiting to see the other for whom he had been praying during the Divine Liturgy.

It did not take long for him to show up. But what a difference! His appearance was radiating! The evil spirits had disappeared. His Guardian-Angel was covering him with his wings. He seemed so content now! He was glowing!

- Thank God, accidentally slipped through the Saint's lips.

The monks turned their heads in wonder.

It was then when he revealed to them what he had seen in the Church that morning. Then Abba Paul forced the monk to tell him the mood he was in when he went to the Liturgy and the mood he was in when he left. He, of course, did not hesitate to Confess in front of everyone as he said the following:

- Up to this day my days went by in neglect. My passions had flared

up. My thoughts ran wild inside my heart. My mind was darkened... But today God was merciful towards me! I heard an urge in the Prophetic reading: "Wash you, be clean; remove your iniquities from your souls..., cease from your iniquities; learn to do well... and though your sins be as purple, I will make them white as snow".[1]

My heart was crushed... my eyes filled with tears. I fell down on my knees and asked for God's mercy, like the prodigal son: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight...", like the thief, "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom...", like the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner...", like the leper, "Jesus master, have mercy on me...", like the blind man, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me"!...

I stood up with a sense of relief from all the weight and guilt as I had decided never to sin again and to go for confession immediately...

Saint Paul and the monks admired his confession and said:

- Indeed, the value of repentance, of man's decision never to sin again, is priceless![2]

So, this is why we cry asking for the "remission of our sins".

♦ "ALL THINGS GOOD AND PROFITABLE FOR OUR SOULS AND PEACE FOR THE WORLD, LET US ASK OF THE LORD"

This petition is divided into two parts.

- The **first** part: **"All things good and profitable for our souls"**
- and the second one: **"peace for the world let us ask of the Lord"**.

Most of us modern Greek Orthodox Christians do not know what we are asking for. In our era, which is so materialistic and atheistic, the only thing we think of is material and sensual pleasures, glory, and the power of authority, honours, physical rest, having a good time, and making easy money. Thus, we are led to hard - heartedness, cruelty, indifference, to the refutation of moral values and we forget what the most important thing is: "for what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"[3] However, pursuing materialistic things has proved by History to be the cause of destruction, man's irreversible damage and his eternal hell. One thing is profitable: the profitable thing for our souls and our absolute trust in the Most Holy God.

The second part of the petition stresses the fact that being peaceful with in ourselves by displacing sin, is the best way of accomplishing our high aim, the spiritual life in Christ, which constitutes the only profitable thing for our souls.

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[1] Is. 1,16-18

[2] Chambakis Theodore, Abbot, *The Gerondikon*, Thessalonica 1993[9], p.140

[3] Mark 8,36

Do you want to know what kind of things people ask for today?

114. Many years ago there used to come a relatively young woman to Saint Barbara, who would light the large candles to the Saint, which were as tall as her! She once told me:

- Please, father, can you read a prayer of supplication to the Saint, whom I adore, so that I can separate from my husband and marry my "friend"...!!!

You can imagine ... the response she received![1]

Just think, however!!! That the Most Holy God be an accomplice to her act of adultery as well as her divorce. Who? Lord Who is Most Pure, He Who commands: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."[2] Indeed! She would deceive her unfortunate husband relying on Saint Barbara's help so that she would accomplish her illegal aims! She also had two children!

Second example:

115. Years ago a lady wanted to offer me a sack of money!!! Saying:

- I will give you as many million drachmas as you wish in order to persuade God since you get on well with Him, (that's what she told me!) to break the spell with my lover, who had abandoned me -the unfortunate man was also married- and return to my arms again, after he would separate him from his wife and three children![3]

Imagine the boldness and sleaziness of the worst kind! They wish to exploit the priests in their illegal actions and in cash in fact! Terribly tragic!

And a third example from the many that exist:

116. Many years ago someone came to ask me to beseech God to put his neighbour in jail, for he had treated him unjustly. The neighbour had kicked out his son, married with two children, from work. Furious with rage he told me:

- Instead of me killing him and ending up in jail, pray so that God may put him in jail![4]

Oh, what pitiful absurdity! Such similar instances can be narrated by all Spiritual fathers.

There is also another "wrong" mentality. Many are used to saying: "I do not wish him any harm. Only that his children suffer the same way I have" or "let God be the judge for what I have gone through"! And unfortunately

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1, 3, 4 Personal notes

2 Mark 10,9

these are said during Holy Confession! This is terribly bad for the soul and is called a "polite" curse. All these people forget that while Christ was on the Cross He did not ask that His crucifiers be punished or for their revenge, but He asked His Heavenly Father that may they be forgiven.

117. While praying one night, long before Saint Andrew, the fool for Christ started his strange mission in the world, he came to ecstasy and found himself in the Royal Palaces of Heaven.

The Heavenly King called him and said:

- Would you like to serve me with all your soul so that I make you one of my officials in my palace?

- Is there anyone, Master, who does not want his own good? he replied I, however, truly want to do it."

- Well, if you want to do it, have a taste of my Kingdom.

At the same time he offered him something to drink. It looked like snow and it was so sweet and tasty that no human being could ever have imagined.

As soon as he drank it, he said:

- Give me some more, please, for when I drank it I sensed a pleasant smell like a divine myrrh.

He gave him a second one, this time it looked like a quince. However, this one was more sour and bitter than wormwood. When Saint Andrew drank it, he was most embittered and disappointed and forgot the previous wonderful taste.

Seeing that he was sad the King told him:

- See, how you are unable to tolerate the food or drink's bitter taste? I made you understand the most perfect way in which someone can serve me. This is exactly the strait gate and "narrow ...way which leadeth unto life".

- I find this thing bitter, Master. Who can serve You by eating and drinking this poison?

- It is the bitter one that you remember, the King replied. Isn't it the sweet one that you forgot? Didn't I give you to taste the sweet one before the bitter one?

- Yes, Master, but you told me that the narrow way resembles the bitter taste.

- No, on the contrary! This way is situated between the bitter and the sweet. The bitter is the hard work, the struggles and the sweat for virtue, whereas the sweet and tasty one is the freshness, the rest and consolation, which my Goodness offers to those who are sad and suffer and who go through martyrdom as a favour for me. Therefore, I do not offer only the bitter, or only the sweet, but a little bit of this and a little bit of that. One succeeds the other. So, if you want to serve me, tell me so I know.

- Give them to me again to taste and I will tell you, the blessed one replied. He gave him the bitter one first. Saint Andrew then said most embittered:

- I cannot serve You and eat from this one. It is bitter and unbearable.

The King smiled and as he took out something from His bosom that smelled really nice, he told him:

- Take and eat, so that you may forget everything.

He actually took one to eat. For a long time he felt such pleasure, such sweetness and joy, so much rejoicing and blessedness that it was beyond himself. He thought that he was living in a tremendously pleasant state, glory, glowing, and divine pleasantness. When he came round, he fell before the feet of that great Heavenly King pleading Him:

- Have mercy on me, Good Master, and accept me so that I may serve You, for I truly understood that serving You is very pleasant.

- Believe me, He told him, that of all my wealth this is the most trivial! Of course, you will go back now... If you serve me the remaining days of your life well with self-denial, then whatever I have, will be ALL yours! You will be the heir of my Kingdom! "And all mine are thine".

This is the way in which the King spoke before He let him go. Immediately Saint Andrew came round and as time went by he truly understood the meaning of his divine calling and revelation about how he was to serve Him the remaining days of his life.[1]

♦ "THAT WE MAY COMPLETE THE REMAINING TIME OF OUR LIFE IN PEACE AND REPENTANCE, LET US ASK OF THE LORD".

Stifled by anxiety and life's matters, just like by any form of worldly and sinful pleasure, we have no idea about how our life has gone by. Thus, we waste our time living with indifference and callousness. We are under the impression that we will never die. We do not want to believe that we will die. We do not want to die!!!

There are people, the majority of whom see that their life is going by and worry. However, they worry in a worldly way. Unfortunately, although our loging are natural, yet they are earthly. We want, for example, to live in

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[1] Holy Monastery of Parakletos, *Saint Andrew, the Fool for Christ*, Oropos Attica 2000[15], p. 31

order to see our children married, to see our grandchildren and great grandchildren or see them having obtained their university degrees. Then again we want to live in order to see our house or our cottage built, expand our business or store. In order to buy a new car, certain land, even a yacht! That is to say, we do not have any spiritual and supernatural worries.

Our quest is poor, secular, wordly. Still, God requires from us: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you".[1] God provides for all these things which are necessary and important to us and must be settled. If we ask for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, God will grant us that which will prove to be beneficial for the good state of our soul.

Peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit; it is the tranquillity and calmness of conscience. Therefore, man's happiness depends first and foremost on the witnessing of conscience; to what extent is man able to sleep calmly and tranquil at night without feeling guilty. Within the Christian heart, peace along with the other fruits of the Holy Spirit creates Paradise, the Kingdom of God.

We are human however. If a man, of whom I am the first, sins and falls, he will lose his peace. Can't we regain this peace, which we have lost with our fall and sin? We can! Yes, we can despite our constant falls and slippery slopes, however big or small!

The means by in which the sinful man can find the peace he has lost, is repentance. Have we sinned? We need not despair. We hasten to the Spiritual Father, fall before his feet and ask for God's forgiveness and mercy. Nevertheless, we should not be in a state of repentance only when we go for confession, but all the time; every day, every hour, every moment. Repentance should accompany us for a lifetime. Man is not able to stay away from sin not for one day... - what am I saying?- not even for an hour! He might not have sinned in action, but he most certainly sins with his thoughts, his mood, his desire; with his mind and his senses. No one is clean from the filth, the dirt and uncleanness of sin, even if his life is for one day, says the Holy Bible through the mouth of Job: "For who shall be pure from uncleaness? Not even one; if even his life should be but one day upon the earth".[2]

♦ "A CHRISTIAN ENDING TO OUR LIFE, PAINLESS, BLAMELESS, PEACEFUL AND A GOOD DEFENSE BEFORE THE FEARFUL JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, LET US ASK"

The Christian who spends his life within the liturgical life of the Church, looks forward to the future with trust. He is not afraid of contem-

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[1] Mat. 6,33

[2] Job 14,4-5

plating the last moment of his earthly life. He has been cleansed with repentance and through Holy Communion he is foretasting the Kingdom of Heaven. And he prays to God that he may not lose that which he is foretasting. "He is aware of the fact that the time that is to come following repentance is filled with contentment, and exultation. And his heart's joy, his peaceful conscience, mocks death, it ignores it, and he is not captivated by Hades, for this joy never ceases".[1]

For those who have truly repented, death is the beginning of a new eternal life. That is to say, death is a gain, the crown and glory of the Kingdom of God.

Saint Ignatius writes to the faithful of Rome, as he is marching towards martyrdom: "My time of birth is near". That's why, forgive me, brothers. Do not stand in the way of my wanting to live do not wish for me to die (as far as the soul is concerned). Let me receive the pure light. When I arrive there, in heaven and close to my God, I will be a real person. I wish to be grinded by the beasts' teeth, like wheat is grinded by a mill".[2] Saint Ignatius wants to tell us that what we consider life is death while the so-called death leads us to life , life eternal; indeed the life like it appears to be in the following story:

118. In a village in Drama during the night of the Resurrection, following the Divine Liturgy of Pascha there is a devout custom that involves Christians going to the village's Cemetery in order to light up the vigil lamps in the tombs of their beloved ones. In this way, they state that some day, in the depths of time, their dead ones will be resurrected, so that they may be judged in the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, the lit vigil-lamps in all of the tombs inside the cemetery indicate the resurrection of the dead in the future.

Many years ago, a young woman went together with other co-villagers of hers, to light up the vigil lamp that belonged to her grandmother's who had passed away a few days ago.

As she was lighting it up she chanted "Christ Is Risen".

And all of a sudden, as she was filled with astonishment and wonder, she saw the dead, who were dressed in all-white, being resurrected and escorted to the Heavens by thousands of Angels. In fact, all of creation around was bathed in an all-bright flood of light... in an all-white light brighter than the sun... Simultaneously, myriads of inconceivable Angelic chants that would literally daze her with their sweetness could be heard.

This vision and experience lasted up to the point when she came round after she had felt that someone was pushing her on the shoulder.

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[1] Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Philokalia of the Watchful and Ascetic Fathers, Mystical Prayer*, vol.19E, Thessalonica 1990, p.39

[2] Saint Ignatius the Godbearer, LGFCA 2, 275

Her parents who restlessly were searching for her in agony because of her long delay had come.

She narrated this story, as a nun, a few days prior to her death.[1]

As soon as the petition **"A christian ending to our life..."** is heard most of the church-going faithful, but also the priests who intone it, make the sign of the Cross. This indicates how important it is for our salvation.

This petition brings to mind death, our end. As a matter of fact, this remembrance, memory of death is beneficial for man. "Remember the end, and thou shalt never do amiss",[2] the Holy Scriptures assure us. This was Saint Anthony's the Great password.

The remembrance of death is the medication that leads to salvation. If the christian thinks day and night that he may die today or during the night while he is sleeping, he will certainly not sin, at least willingly. Our day will go by in goodness, patience, with good deeds, with fasting and prayer, doing our work, whatever that may be, decently and reliably.

Saint John of the Ladder says that "like bread is the most essential food of all, likewise remembrance of death is the most essential thing compared to any other spiritual deed".[3] And it is the most proper of all for it deals with our salvation.

The King of Macedonia, Philip cultivated the remembrance of death. He had commanded a soldier to appear before him morning, noon and night prior to his meal and tell him: "Philip, remember that you are mortal". That is to say: "Philip, do not forget that you are mortal, that you will die." Why don't we Christians do it, since it is so certain that one day we will die?

119. However, let us take a look at the ending of a Geronda, Priest and Spiritual Father Arsenios,.

Since his disciple's, Father Nicholas', departure he was not left alone. Many monks hastened to his side and made an effort to live with him. To those who were not able to tolerate the roughness of his great struggles, he would say the following:

- My dear children, why do you worry? In what have I forced you? If you are very saddened by the fact that you work hard, then each one should sit in his own cell pray a lot and be silent. Only try not to neglect your prayer rule and Church service.

Be vigilant. You should always live with your worries in God, about death and Judgment, about Hell and Paradise and with incessant noetic prayer. Struggle with all your might to cleanse the inner person and

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Sirach, Wisdom 7,36

[3] Saint John of Sinai, *Ladder*, Sermon 6th, Oropos Attica 1986[3], p.134

never accept, not even for a moment, any demonic insult. You should truly confess all your thoughts. Do not conceal them so that the devil may thwart you not. Words, thoughts, memories and deeds must have the same aim: the will of God, holy obedience.

You should have remembrance of death, for we are walking "amongst [many] traps". And he who daily dies as far as his will is concerned will have a Christian ending and will live in the ages to come.

He would give this and much more useful and beneficial advice to those who used to approach him.

On July 4, the year 1845, the Elder Arsenios decided to go to the feast of Saint Athanasius in Lavra. When he had ended his morning Liturgy, he followed the way which took him around Mount Athos and reached Lavra some time before the vigil.

He was standing upright during the vigil and Liturgy in Lavra which lasted for sixteen hours. He went to the refectory only to get some bread and then he set out for the may bach. During the Small Compline he was once again in his cell.

Everyone wondered at this. A young man needs three days, and he who is a seventy year old man, with his feeble feet, stood up for sixteen hours as well as walked such a great distance in one and a half days! Later they asked him:

- Geronda, how could you have come bach so quickly especially after an all night vigil, for the road crosses so many mountains and there are so many sharp stones, rocks, and tough short cuts?

- "[My] youth shall be renewed as the eagle's". Not because I am able to but because God provides," he answered.

At the start of 1846 it seemed as if the death of Geronda Arsenios was approaching. His feet got worse, so much that he could not even work, or walk. Nevertheless, he would serve the liturgy during the Lenten Period four times a week, Sunday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, but with great toil.

On Saturday of the Fifth week of Lent a rumour had spread in all of Mount Athos that Geronda was ill. On Sunday morning, the 24th of March, his spiritual children gathered in order to receive his blessing. They asked him:

- Truly, father, aren't you afraid of death? Don't you tremble and fear of your defence before the righteous Judge? YOU WERE A SPIRITUAL FATHER FOR THIRTY YEARS! Aren't you afraid?!"

Geronda looked at them joyfully and said:

- I do not tremble or fear, for my heart is filled with infinite joy and hope that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will not leave me according to His mercy, even though I do not have any good deeds. For what can I boast about except for my feebleness? I have not done any-

thing good on my own will and whatever good I have done, I did it with my Lord's help and because it was God's will.

Thus, I am heading for the beginning of the eternal day and my joy is tremendous. I am at peace and all my bodily members are filled with rest and divine joy. I am awaiting for my Angels in a while...

As a matter of fact, how many of today's Spiritual fathers - Priests would have be an able to boldly say the same exact words?

Afterwards he asked all his spiritual children to pass, one by one for them to grant and receive forgiveness, he gave his last blessing and teaching to each one separately as to where and how to spend the remaining days of their lives, and then asked everyone to depart.

He started to pray, however it was impossible to make out a word he was saying. He raised his hands three times towards the sky. The place was lit up and the fathers fell on their knees... made the sign of the Cross and looked in awe... A most sweet smelling savor started spreading everywhere.

Geronda lowered his hands, made the sign of the Cross and then crossed them on his chest... A strange stillness, an inexpressible tranquillity spread all around.

The monks approached and saw Geronda Arsenios' face illumined... His holy soul was surrendered into his Lord's hands, Whom he loved so much since he was a little boy and for Whose sake he had dried up his body.

These were "the Christian endings" of an athlete of faith, "painless, blameless, peaceful". May ours be likewise.[1]

This is the ending of holy people. In contrast to the ending of so many Saints, the ending of Judas Iscariot was neither painless, nor blameless or peaceful. And although he was made worthy to become Christ's disciple, to listen to His magnificent teaching, to see His miracles, to have proof of His Divinity nevertheless, his passion of avarice won him over, betrayed his Lord and Teacher and departed, and went and hanged himself".[2] "And falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out".[3] The rope could not hold him, the branch broke and he fell down. Then his intestines poured out... Not even earth itself received him!

Therefore, we ought to be prudent. For, there's many a slip between cup and lip! And such a fearful hour is the last hour of our life!

120. A devout priest told me about another priest, who unfortunately was very careless when serving the liturgy. So careless that the

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[1] Holy Monastery of Xeropotamou, *Hagiorite Testament*, magazine issue 16-17, 1992, p.111

[2] Mat. 27,5 [3] Acts 1,18

"Pearls" of the Precious Body and the drops from the Most Holy Blood of our Lord would scatter here and there, either when he himself would receive or when he would give the faithful Holy Communion. He used to say characteristically about this carelessness of his:

- Come on, it's not the end of the world. It is only bread and wine!

However, when he got seriously ill and his concelebrant gave him Holy Communion he chewed bloodstained FLESH, for God "wants everyone to be saved and reach the knowledge of truth"! He spit them in terror and agitated as he was he shouted:

- Are you making fun of me?! You came to fool me with meat?

His concelebrant bent down and gathered the Portion of the Lord's Precious Body with his mouth. Having eaten the holy Portion, he got up and told him with great pain:

- I hope you come round, before it's too late for the salvation of your soul. What I have given you, was from the Holy Gifts Box of Great and Holy Thursday. Jesus Christ's real Body and Blood!

And he concluded by asking him:

- Would you like me to come again?

- No, he answered soulless on the one hand but again agitated. Unfortunately, he died unrepentant the same night...![1]

A bitter lesson, brethren and concelebrant fathers, for the ONE WHOM we cut up and commune, when we officiate the immaculate Mysteries.

121. Once my Geronda narrated the following event, which occurred in a Skete:

An Hagiorite priest, who at the same time was a father-Confessor, was seriously ill. His disciple seeing that he was getting worse every day, asked him one day at noon:

- Don't you by any chance want me to bring you a Spiritual father for confession and for Holy Communion?

After looking at his disciple for a while, he turned over and spit on the floor. Seeing his saliva on the ground and in this way realizing that he has yet to live, he replied:

- No!!!

His disciple left by saying "may it be blessed" leaving the door of his Geronda open. He hadn't yet left the Hut in order to go to the yard, and he heard voices coming from his Geronda.

Running inside he heard him saying with great agony:

- I was not a worthy priest!!! I was not worthy!!!

And passed away...[2]

One more lesson which is equally painful!...

[1, 2] Personal notes

These true events serve as a precise warning towards all Christians, especially however for the Celebrants of any rank of the Most High. So, in order for us not to lose our boldness when we officiate before the Holy Altar, and for the ending of our life to be "Christian, painless, blameless, peaceful...", so that we may have "a good defence...", we should repent daily and Confess frequently. The demon makes an effort to exploit the last moments not only of the priests but also of those simple Christians. Many times, friends and relatives, who surround the bed of those who are sick instead of preparing him for the voyage towards eternity, for death and God's Judgment then, become the devil's instruments, so much so that the poor thing loses his soul, is damned, by not allowing the priest to approach the sick for Confession and Holy Communion.

Yet the Christian who is not waiting for his last moments to prepare for his death, is ready from before:

- by doing vigils, fasting and praying,
- by following the most divine evangelical commandments,
- by partaking in the most holy Mysteries appropriately,
- by showing forgiveness to all,
- by being patient without any complaint,
- by being prudent as far as his thoughts and words are concerned,
- by avoiding judging other people above all,
- by having remembrance of death and mourning,
- by showing charity and real love towards his enemies
- by doing all the rest that the Lord commands through His Gospel and His holy Church.

Therefore, during his last moments, the Christian who is characterized by devoutness and a virtuous life is ready. He spends them with a hope of certainty that the Holy God's infinite mercy will protect him, will close his eyes in a peaceful manner...

What a blessing, my God! What a blessing! what a blessing!...

May the Lord Who loves mankind have mercy on us all and through our Angels may we have an ending that may be **"painless, blameless, peaceful..."** without any scandal, triumphant!

5. THE PRAYER OF THE PROSKOMEDIA

After the petitions of the "Litany of Supplication" the priest reads in a low tone of voice the **Prayer of the Proskomedia**:

"O Lord God Almighty, who alone art Holy, who dost accept a Sacrifice of praise from those who call upon Thee with their whole heart: Receive also the prayer of us sinners, and lead us to Thy holy altar, and enable us to offer unto Thee gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and for the ignorance of the people, and make us worthy to find grace in Thy sight, that our sacrifice may be acceptable unto Thee and that the good Spirit of Thy Grace may rest upon us and upon these Gifts here spread forth and upon all Thy people.

And aloud: **Through the compassions of Thine only-begotten Son, with whom thou art blessed, together with Thine All-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages",**

The people: **Amen**.

This Prayer refers to four things:

- **First:** The Celebrant Priest confesses God's Almightiness and Holiness. God is the only Almighty, the only All-Sovereign, the only One who is Holy. He is the Father, the Creator, the Maker.
- **Second:** He asks that the Lord God may accept the supplications of the congregation.
- **Third:** That He make all the priests worthy of serving **BOTH** for themselves **AND** the faithful.
- And **fourth:** That the Sacrifice of the Church may be pleasingly accepted and that the Holy Spirit may overshadow the Celebrant Priests, the Precious Gifts and the faithful.[1]

With the **Prayer of Proskomedia** we the Celebrant priests ask our Lord Jesus Christ that we may be made worthy to offer the Precious Gifts, first and foremost for our own **"sins"** and then for the **"ignorance"** of the people.

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid, p.295

The priests' transgressions are called, as we have previously mentioned, sins, whereas the transgressions of the faithful, ignorance. The former for being committed knowingly, the latter for being committed in ignorance. The priest is not allowed any ignorance. His most trivial and smallest sins are big, not by nature, but because they are burdened by the rank of the priest, who dares to commit them. The **Old Testament** mentions that: If one of the Israelites commits a sin out of ignorance or neglect, he will offer a small sacrifice. If however the anointed priest commits a sin it is as if all the people have sinned![1] **Saint John Chrysostom** says that this event reveals that the priest's traumas, that is to say his sins, his falls, his mistakes, require greater help; so much as is required by all the peoples' traumas put together, for he is burdened by the "rank" of his Priesthood![2]

- Thus, the bishop is burdened by all the sins of the people in his Jurisdiction.
- The priest by all the falls of the people in his parish.
- And the Spiritual Father for all the traumas of his spiritual children, for he does not proceed with curing them in an appropriate way.

The Celebrant - Priest commits sins... and the people fall into ignorance... Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only one without sin the God-Man Lord, the incarnate God the Word!

Although peoples' sins are called "ignorance", the moment they learn and are informed about the will of God it is from then on that they are set responsible. That is why he will be asked to give account on Judgment day of ("...the servant who knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself... shall be beaten with many stripes...")[3]

From the **Prayer of Proskomedia** we should pay attention to the words: **"with their whole heart"**.

We should love God the way the Saints, Martyrs and Confessors, the great Fathers of our Church and all the Anchorites did. We should love Him with such might, such flame, such faith, that together with Apostle Paul we may confess: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord".[4]

The words, **"to find Grace in Thy sight"** of the same Prayer, are also noteworthy. We ask that we may find Grace in the Lord, the way Prophet David did according to what is said in the Acts,[5] and the Apostles who, dur-

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[1] Lev. 4,1-3

[2] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.245

[3] Luk. 12,47 [4] Rom. 8,35-39 [5] Acts 7,46

ing Pentecost, "were filled with the Holy Spirit".[1] In this way, we priests and you, faithful church-going Christians, should also find the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Particularly, however, we ask that the might and Grace of God the Most High may overshadow us, the way it overshadowed the Most Holy Theotokos: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee",[2] for indeed she had found "favour with God".[3]

Thus we "come boldly to the throne of grace", according to Apostle Paul: "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."[4] Not only find Grace in the Lord, but also it is mercy; that both of them together (Grace and mercy) may be a current help during the crucial hours of our personal temptations...

Following the Prayer of the Proskomedia the priest says aloud:
"Through the compassions of Thine only - begotten Son, with Whom Thou art blessed, together with Thine All-Holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".
And the people reply: **"Amen"**.

We ask God - the Father, the All-Sovereing to accept our prayers. And God - the Father accepts them, but "through the compassions of His only-begotten Son". We also fervently beseech Him that the Grace of the Holy Spirit may overshadow

- and us, His unworthy celebrants,
- and the Precious Gifts
- and the faithful people!

And He makes our petitions come true, but **"through the compassions of His only-begotten Son".**

Why is it that we say "compassions" and not "mercy"?

"Mercy" is the offering of a tender heart. **"Compassions"** is the urge for offering and benefiting. It is the longing to be Sacrificed on the Cross, due to the love, which burns the "tender mercies"!

122. Saint Silouanos, a new Saint of our Church, once met an Hagiorote hermit who had the gift of compunction and constant tearing. Whenever he saw him, his eyes would shed tears. Silent tears would stream down his emaciated cheeks. Especially the tears of Divine Grace would run down his cheeks during Divine Worship. These tears would also be streaming down when he used to pray, when he would remember the Lord's Sacred Passion and Crucifixion, the Most Holy Theotokos and the Angels, the Kingdom of Heaven and the joy of the Saints!...

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[1] Acts 2, 4 [2] Luk. 1,35 [3] Luk. 1,30 [4] Hebr. 4,16

Saint Silouanos approached him and asked him on purpose in order to find out:

- Father, is it good to pray for the dead?

He sighed and through his tears told him:

- If it were possible, I would take all the souls out of Hades, where they suffer so and are tormented by the merciless hell and the feeling of darkness...! I would take them out...Yes, I would take them out... Only then would my soul find rest and joy!

And he would make a small movement with his hands, as if he were gathering ears of wheat... And he would again begin to cry...[1]

By taking care of **"the remaining time of our life"**, so that we may find Grace and mercy in the Lord, we should be patient during our temptations, our troubles and illnesses, which many times could be very painful and "merciless" (no drug is capable of relieving them). If, however, during these circumstances we are patient and glorify God, we will find His Grace and mercy in abundance. Otherwise, if we complain the same exact salvation of our souls is in danger.

123. Many times the Priest Hadzi-George the Athonite would recall a great grandfather of his, who suffered from dreadful pain tormented by an unknown and incurable, for his time, disease. When he once lost his patience, the sick man asked God to take him away, for he could not suffer anymore. Even though he was pious, he had given up.

Then an Angel appeared to him and told him:

- You are being tormented on earth, so that you may be cleansed, the way gold is in fire, and shine like the sun. You must therefore be tried for one more year. I ask you: What do you prefer? A year of trials and tribulations and pain or three hours in hell, in order for you to see where the unrepentant sinners go and how they will be tormented unto the ages?

The sick old man thought: "One more year with trials and dreadful pain here in bed... oh, it is a long time! It is better to be patient even for three hours in hell..."

So he replied to the Angel that he accepts the three hours in hell. The Angel immediately took him gently-gently and carried him to Hades... While the Angel was moving away he told him:

- I will be back after three hours.

There was an unbearable feeling of darkness everywhere and infinite intolerable pain... A merciless place. No light, no words of consolation anywhere. The eternal darkness that dominated the place, the cru-

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[1] Ioannikios Archmindrite, *Gerondikon from Athos*, ibid, p.242-243

shing, the voices of distress of the damned which could be heard and their agitated countenance, the misery..., all these, would give the miserable old man an awful sense of terror and sorrow. He would see and hear misery everywhere. Wherever he looked, he would be faced with despair, fear and the dreadful sight of hell. Nowhere was there a voice of joy in this endless abyss of hell. Only the demons' red burning eyes which were ready to tear him into pieces could be seen in the darkness.

The poor man started trembling and crying, but his cries were answered only by the abyss. It seemed to him that all the misery and pain that had accumulated throughout the centuries had gone by and he was expecting his Angel minute by minute to come, but it would not happen.

Finally, he was in despair for he believed that he would never see Paradise, therefore, he began crying and moaning; but no one would care for him. The unrepentant sinners in hell were only thinking about themselves: their own misery and their own unbearable pain. The demons were those who were "glad"...

But there, in the abyss, the Angel's sweet glow appeared. With a heavenly smile the Angel stood over the tormented person and asked:

- How are you, my fellow?

- I could not think that there would be falsehood amongst the Angels, the tormented person whispered in a feeble voice.

- What does this mean? asked the Angel.

- What do you think it means? the wretched man went on. You promised to take me from here after three hours and since then it seems to me that thousands of years, whole centuries have passed in unbearable misery. You did not feel sorry for me at all...You lied to me...

- Blessed one, what years, what centuries? said the Angel astonished. Only one hour has passed since I left, and you must stay here for two more hours. Isn't this what you chose to do?

- What?! Two hours? No! I can't take it anymore...Oh no! Not anymore, I can't... Please, I beg you, take me away from here...A thousand times the trials on earth, those and many more and many more, and not only for one year, but for the rest of my life. Only take me away from here, take me from the terror of hell...have pity on me...not another two hours! The tormented one yelled and moaned, raising his hands to the Angel in a pleading manner.

- Okay then, replied the Angel. The All-Merciful God, the Lover of mankind, the Tender-Hearted, the Loving One, will have mercy on you. Glorify God's love for mankind and never moan from now on...

And with these words he grabbed him and immediately he found himself in his bed once again, glorifying and giving thanks to God for his illnesses and pain, until the day he departed.[1]

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[1] Paisios Gerondas Hagiorite, *Gerondas HatziGeorge the Athonite*, 1986, p.29-32

♦ "PEACE BE TO ALL"

During the Divine Worship the priest many times calls upon God's peace, which he also offers:

- Before the Gospel reading: **"Peace be to all"**.
- When he speaks: **"Peace be to all"**.
- When he blesses: **"Peace be to all"**.
- When he invites us to the kiss of love: **"Peace be to all"**.
- When the Sacrifice has taken place, and again: **"Peace be to all"**.
- During the triune blessing: **"grace and peace unto you"**.

If the hearts of all those who are in the Church should be at peace, how much more so let alone the heart of the priest! The celebrant should be present in the Divine Worship as an imitator of Christ. That is why the faithful, through the chanter, reciprocating the prayer for peace, turn towards the Celebrant Priest and say:

♦ "AND TO THY SPIRIT"

That is to say: peace not only to us, but also to you. Woe to the priest who, when he is liturgizing has hatred in his soul, bears malice and envy. The priest is at peace regardless of the stance of the faithful.

One thing is certain: What we ask for through the Prayers of the Liturgy and its supplications, we ask for them in faith and established hope since the Divine Liturgy is an eternal reality in the Person and work of God - Man Jesus Christ! He is the One and only "mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus".[1] He presents us and brings us to God - the Father with His own Sacrifice on Golgotha! Thus Christ, with Divine Worship and Holy Communion, guarantees that whatever it is we experience, whatever it is we ask for and whatever it is we receive, it is certain and real! Peace it is we ask, peace it is we receive...

[1] I Tim. 2,5

6. THE KISS OF PEACE

Two are the most important features of the faithful Christian: love and faith, which are the "bridal garments", so that he may enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Sometimes, first comes faith as the root of all virtue, while other times it is love, as the crown of all virtue, according to Apostle Paul's hymn of love.[1]

♦ "LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER, THAT WITH ONE ACCORD WE MAY CONFESS".

In other words, let us love one another that we may confess in harmony. The celebrant's same urge, in the most archaic form of the Divine Liturgy, is heard with the words: "Greet ye one another with a holy kiss."[2]

As the priests exchange the kiss of peace in a vivid way amongst themselves they say: **"Christ is in our midst"**. And the other one responds: **"He is and shall be"**.

In ancient times the faithful used to exchange the kiss of peace likewise amongst themselves, the men from the women separately. This pure, holy, and clean kiss was an external expression of love, which existed in the hearts of the first Christians. It was a blessed, heavenly and angelic kiss, especially during the years of the Martyrs and in fact in the arenas together with the wild animals, in the prisons and the Catacombs.

However, when the love amongst Christians started diminishing and being spoiled, then this sacred habit also started vanishing bit-by-bit and was limited only to the priests, inside the Holy Bema.

The kiss of peace is not a merely liturgical symbol, but a celebration, a liturgical experience. It is not the image of love that unites the faithful but the experience of this union; it is its outcome. It is the experience of reconciliation and bonding among the faithful and their union with Christ."Dear brothers, let us recall the holy kisses and the dreadful kiss, which we give one another during the Divine Liturgy. This kiss unites our souls and unites us all together in one body".[3]

"The kiss during the Divine Liturgy is a sign that our souls have become one mixture, one thing, one power, which gets rid of exiles, and displa-

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[1] I Cor. 13,1-8 [2] I Cor. 16,20

[3] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 49,382

ces from our hearts once and for all every bearing of malice, jealousy, envy and division".[1]

Revengelessness and love is the first prerequisite for approaching the holy Sanctuary and sit at Christ's Table, that is to say draw near Holy Communion.

This liturgical embrace as a Sacred Ritual is an act of love and faith, but also evidence that the passions have been exiled from within us. With the holy kiss we enjoy one another's love. We enter inside the other's soul and the other enters inside us. Each one becomes the other, belongs to the other, belongs to everyone. It is "love's mutual concession"; real love not theoretical.

Therefore, every action, every word, every move and every event in the Divine Liturgy is similar to the daily things in our lives, but transformed, spiritualized, sanctified. During the Divine Worship matter is sanctified and the flesh becomes spiritual. Thus, this kiss among the priests and the faithful takes on new dimensions; heavenly ones...

124. In July 1933 a team of scientists stopped near a concentration camp in the city of Irkoutsk, Siberia for a few days. There weren't any inhabitants in this city, only detainees, who did forced labour for a certain construction. Most of them were priests, deacons, monks, and a few bishops.

Those camps were dominated by an unheard of barbarity. Without any reason the captives were whipped, battered roughly to the point where their bones were broken and they were shot. The living conditions were dreadful. Most of them died from tremendous cold and famine.

"The weather during the month of July was pleasant. After supper, the one who described the event says, we sat until late at night by the fire, discussing amongst ourselves. Every once in a while we could hear cries and loud groaning coming from the adjoining camp...The night was starry and calm...Yet, I will not forget that Siberian valley as long as I live. I will always remember it.

Our sweet morning sleep was suddenly interrupted by a gloomy human groan. We got up straight away. The team leader, a local from Irkoutsk, quickly took a pair of binoculars, while the rest of us set up two topographic instruments and supposedly were doing our work, when we noticed a crowd coming toward us. As there were many bushes, it was difficult for us to understand what was going on right away.

There were sixty detainees and as they were approaching we could see more clearly that all of them were exhausted, emaciated by famine, hard work, ill-treatment and cruel behaviour.

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[1] Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, P.G. 33,1112 A

Nevertheless, what did our eyes see in astonishment? All of them were holding a rope on their shoulders. And with it they were pulling a sledge, on top of which was a barrel full of human excrements!

The guards, who were escorting them, apparently were not aware of the fact that there was a scientific mission near the place where the concentration camp was located. We heard the guards' exact order: "Lie down and do not move". A guard ran back to the camp. Obviously, they considered us suspicious.

Someone from our team assessed the detainees' condition fairly quickly and said: "We prolonged their life for a few more minutes." At first we could not comprehend his words. However, in 15 to 20 minutes we were surrounded by a platoon of the camp's guards, who approached us holding rifles ready for battle, as if they were ready to attack with bayonets.

The head of the platoon as well as the political commissioner approached us and asked for our papers. When they examined them, they explained to us that these sixty men had been condemned to be executed, as they were an alien and hostile element toward the soviet, socialistic power of Stalin.

A huge ditch had already been prepared for those sixty men. The political commissioner asked us to go inside our tents, so we did. The sixty Martyrs were all Priests. During the calm July morning the feeble voices of many Priests could be clearly heard.

By making holes on our tents we saw, heard and lived the Holy Martyrs' first Church...

THE PRIESTS WERE EMBRACING ONE ANOTHER WITH A HOLY KISS... One of them raised his hands up high and shouted in a loud voice: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing". As a result he was given a kick and fell down.

Then, they pushed all of them near the ditch. One of the executioners would ask the Priests, who were now standing near the ditch, one by one:

- This is your last breath. Tell us is there a God, yes or no?

The Holy Martyr Priests' response was firm and certain:

- Yes, there is a God!

The first gunshot could be heard.

We sat and watched from inside our tents as our hearts were about to burst... Tears began to run down our cheeks...

A second gunshot echoed..., a third one... and then more of them...

The Priests were led one after the other near the ditch at the edge of which the executioners would ask each one:

- Is there a God?

The answer was the same:

- Yes, there is a God!

Or they would say:

- Yes, there is! As there is also the Son of God, the Saviour of man!

And others would add:

- Yes, there is! And the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos exists and the Saints exist!

And others:

- Yes, there is! And He forgives you, as we do...

And before they had the time to complete what they were saying, a gunshot was heard...

We were eye witnesses...We saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears our Lord Jesus Christ's sixty Celebrant Priests, facing death, giving the holy kiss and love's embrace, forbearing and forgiving, praying for their executioners and for the whole Russian people and finally confessing with so much courage their faith in God...

Years, even decades might go by. Yet, this tomb on the road to Katsung-Niznie-Undisk, must be found. None of the Orthodox Christians, anywhere should forget those Holy Martyrs, who in July 1933 gave their life for the Orthodox faith near the uninhabited city of Irkoutsk...[1]

Through this true story we can see in deed the two elements of Divine Worship, faith and love, coupled with forgiveness and the lack of bearing malice! We saw the kiss of peace, the soul's forbearance and the miracle of faith! And in fact, before death! What do we, of little faith and lukewarm Christians of our century, have to say?

The urge **"let us love one another"** is linked to Christ's historical Figure. It is linked to the Sacrifice, which He Himself offered on the dreadful Golgotha. We saw in a practical sense this love being imitated by the Priest - Martyrs of Russia, like the millions of Martyrs and New martyrs of our faith.

Without faith, love does not have a pedestal to stand on. Without Christ, love - even this natural love - degenerates, gets distorted, gets corrupted and ends up being a false mask of human selfishness.

Faith is a gift from God. That is why the Apostles used to cry: "Increase our faith".[2] And when the Lord appears in His Second Coming, He will not seek to find out whether you have done a lot of charity work in order for it "to be seen by men", whether you have done any prostrations and supplications, sermons etc. He will seek to find out whether you had faith; real faith though, which can confess "Christ crucified", without any compromise and without hypocrisy. So much faith that the word would make miracles happen.

Faith and the acceptance of the Trinitarian and Christological Dogma are expressed with the love that worketh in God and our fellowmen. Thus,

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[1] Holy Monastery of Xeropotamou, *Hagiorite Witness*, magazine, issue 1, 1988, p.44

[2] Luk. 17,5

the words "love one another" is a brotherly expansion of "love thy neighbor as thyself"[1]. The zenith of this love is expressed in the words "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you".[2] Therefore, let us love one another **"...that with one accord we may confess"**.

Our bad state is irredeemable. Hatred, hostilities, grudges, loathing, jealousy, envy and above all selfishness nestles in our hearts. We are very distant from one another spiritually. Coldness, bearing malice, as well as ulterior motives prevails in our relationships. Even inside the Church the demons do not leave us unimpeded. We have lost the peace and love amongst ourselves and passions reign in their place.

Nevertheless, the moment has come to raise the eyes of our faith up to heaven, so that we may see the great Mystery of the Holy Trinity, Whose main characteristic is the unity of the Persons and the communion of love. And as our Lord Jesus Christ is united with the Father and the Holy Spirit, likewise we on earth ought and must love one another and be united, in a union of peace, harmony, love, and goodness! We should all, and each one separately, become a small icon of the Holy Trinity! And during the Divine Worship there is this icon with the triune union, which is: the Lord sacrificed on the Holy Altar Table, the Celebrant - Priest and the faithful Christians in the Church.

If we are not united in the name of God's Love, not only will we not be able to partake, as we consume, the Immaculate Mysteries, but not even to attend the Divine Liturgy.

Insisting upon this union of love, let us recall the Evangelist of love the Lord's Disciple and Apostle John. According to tradition and biographical information, it is stated that when the Apostle grew older and could not teach the Christians anymore as he used to, he would join the holy congregations only if he would hold on to someone, and instead of giving a sermon he would tell the christians these few words: "My little children, love one another... love one another". He went on saying and repeating these words in the congregations until the day he died, for he who loves, follows all of the Lord's commandments.

However, the Lord Himself also said that what is characteristic of those who believe in Him has to be the love amongst each other. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another".[3] Christ, that is to say, told His Disciples: those who live in the darkness of sin and fallacy shall realize that you are my Disciples, if you have love for one another. Your love will disting vista you from all the people! This will make you stand out!

The Apostles and Christians of the first centuries were attentive to Christ's words by following His example. They imitated Him. They blessed those who reviled them, showed forbearance during persecution and tor-

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[1] Mat. 22,39 [2] Mat. 5,44 [3] Jn.13,35

ture, endured blasphemy and slander in love. They were dreadfully tortured, stoned, crucified, and they in turn forgave, they were thrown to the wild beasts and they prayed, they were burned like candles and they showed loving forbearance! The world, speechless and silent in astonishment, would admire and be instructed by this martyrdom of love. The martyrdom was real proof of the real faith and love of the first Christians. Is there such faith and love today?

The faithful through the Chanters respond to the words **"Let us love one another, that with one accord we may confess"**, by chanting:

♦ **"FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT: THE TRINITY, ONE IN ESSENCE AND UNDIVIDED".**

This is the most brief and epigrammatic confession of the Christian faith. Yet, when there is a co-liturgy and in fact when the bishop is the one serving the liturgy, then the chorus of chanters replies to the words «**love one another**» with the words:

♦ **"I WILL LOVE THEE, O LORD, MY STRENGTH; THE LORD IS MY FIRM FOUNDATION, MY REFUGE, AND MY DELIVERER".**

One of the chanters' responses **"Father, Son and Holy Spirit..."** is a confession of faith, while the other **"I will love thee, O Lord, my strength..."** is a confession of love.

Prior to the mystic and bloodless Sacrifice in the Divine Liturgy the exhortation for love and confession of faith is heard. It is not about a human loving feeling, about a natural human relationship, but about the love which is a divine power and fruit of the Holy Spirit. It gushes forth and fills our hearts; "it is poured out in our hearts".[1]

This love as a sacred reality is possible only "in Christ Jesus", in the faith and Grace of Christ, Whom we discover and see in every brother's face. This live reality is seen in the dreadful martyrdom and confessions of the holy Martyrs.

While the concelebrant priests exchange the kiss of peace the words **"Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: the Trinity, one in essence and undivided"**, are being chanted. Next, there should be absolute silence up to the last

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[1] Rom. 5,5

exchange of the Christian kiss of peace by the concelebrant priests' (as it used to be done according to the ancient order).

During this moment the earth, through Divine Worship and the exchange of the kiss of peace, is united with heaven. The Angels and Archangels mingle with and rejoice together with the faithful Christians who are in Church and the Celebrant Priests. The Church Militant, along with the Church Triumphant, is One Flock with the One Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Unfortunately, as time goes by and at this day and age there is an even greater slackening wich is very-very distressing. This exchange of the kiss of peace among the Celebrant Priests has unfortunately become typical, a mere ritual exhortation. The fact that we do not forget our differences once we are inside the Church is quite sad. We do not open our hearts to a stranger, to the person who is unknown to us, and even more we fail to put those who have harmed us, who have treated us unjustly, who hate us, who might be attending the liturgy with us, possibly even a concelebrant, inside our hearts.

Nevertheless, the exhortation of the Church of Christ is: **"Let us love one another, that with one accord we may confess"**. We cannot confess that we believe in Christ Crucified, if inside us we are preserving a flick of difference with our fellow man. We cannot say "I believe in God!!!" No, we cannot say it! We are lying! **Saint Chrysostom** assures us: "The Lord", he says, "does not consider the honour which we owe Him, in order for love to exist among the faithful. For, reconciliation with our brother is also a sacrifice."[1]

Indeed, we experience great difficulty to be able to tell our neighbour, our own family member, even our companion "forgive me...I apologize" or to forgive the person who swears at us, treats us unfairly, steals from us, the person who steals a piece of our land, who cheats us. Our heart is confused. We toss and turn day and night, here and there, until we get over it, and be the firstones to forgive or apologize to our neighbour, whom we have saddened.

That is why God honours bloodied love very much! For He considers crucified love in action as the greatest sacrifice! A sacrifice superior to any other! If love doesn't exist, He does not accept any sacrifice let alone the sacrifice in the Divine Worship.

The confession of faith should be made **"in harmony"**, with a heart that is not only clean, but also identical to our neighbour's heart. If our soul is rigid, stony and agitated, then, how will we be able to draw near the Mystery of Love?

My Christians, **"Love one another"**. "May we have brotherly love".

125. There was once a person praying with the prayer rope during the Divine Liturgy - the prayer rope was small, ring-shaped, and could

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[1] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.248

not be seen by the other people in the Church - for a moment she felt that she was at the same time present in a heavenly and earthly Church Temple. Nevertheless, she could see and hear what was taking place.

After a while when she hears the priest reciting "let us love one another" the eyes of her soul saw all - glowing and bright Angels and Archangels spiritually embracing one another and at the same time a large number of white - clothed Priests inside the Holy Altar even though the Celebrant Priest was one alone.

As the Divine Liturgy was progressing in an orderly fashion, before her very eyes she saw in awe and infinite sweetness on the Holy Altar Table, instead of the sanctified Holy Gifts, a big Heart, which was being pierced by an enormous spear... and Blood started coming out! A lot of Blood! Crimson and Most Holy!... And this Blood in an all-surprising way came to nourish her! The same thing however happened to other souls inside the Church Temple who were prepared. This all-pure Blood covered all the parts of the soul and body, the heart, the mind, the senses, bodily and spiritual. She was completely inundated by It. The way in which it occurred remains unknown to me!!! The heart was heated up by divine love and was set on fire. The mind was filled with light, the thoughts were still and all - bright, the senses were rejoicing, the bodily parts were in complete, spiritual joy. Peace reigned everywhere, in and on and around her.

And there after a while the Celebrant Priest invited her and the others to partake of the immaculate Mysteries:

- "With fear of God and faith and love, draw near"!

And the Most Holy Blood of the holy Cup was united with Him who - how many hours ago she did not know - she had received spiritually... and had become one and the same... Or was it the same? Who knows!

She continued to sense divine joy which is a feeling of the soul and body, for many days. Tears, plenty of tears...

Oh, my God... Glory to thy Name![1]

[1] Personal notes

7. THE SYMBOL OF FAITH

After exchanging the kiss of peace and confessing the faith in the Triune God, the Deacon's or Celebrant Priest's exclamation follows:

♦ "THE DOORS. THE DOORS. IN WISDOM LET US ATTEND"

Immediately the "SYMBOL OF FAITH" is recited. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave His Disciples and through them to all of us the following commandment: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you".[1]

What do Christ's words in particular mean? Christ says if you have pearls, precious stones, do not throw them to the swine. For, these four legged creatures are in no position to estimate the value of these pearls, and they shall charge at you. The swine are not in need of pearls, but they like living in the mud. Moreover, nobody throws valuable things at dogs.

Christ's saying specifically, is parabolic. The dogs and swine represent the people who do not have faith and live like the animals which lack logic. They live a filthy and sinful life, in debauchery and mud, being constantly nourished by their passions. The corrupted, the unfaithful, even the heretics, are not in a position to evaluate the word of the Gospel, the holy Dogmas and the holy Mysteries of the Church. They will most certainly ignore them. That is why we do not allow them to enter the Church Temple.

After the dismissal of the Catechumens, following the holy Readings, the doors of the Church Temple used to close. Next, during the Holy Anaphora the deacons and sub-deacons would stand by the doors, so that not only the faithful would be allowed to exit but also the unfaithful or heretics would be forbidden to enter.

The "**APOSTOLIC INJUNCTION**" writes: "Let the doors of the Church Temple be guarded, in case someone who is unfaithful or uninitiated enter. And if a certain brother or sister comes with a reference letter from another region may the deacon examine what pertains to them..., whether they are defiled by heresy."[2]

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[1] Mat. 7,6

[2] *Apostolic Injunction*, Book VII, LGFCA 2,150

Just think of the measures that used to be taken during the first period! Thus, no one can enter or exit the Church Temple whenever they wish, whenever they like. Nowadays, there is a slackening as far as keeping the order in the Divine Worship is concerned, which proves that we are "children of disobedience" and transgression. Unfortunately, there aren't any deacons - concierges in the doors of the Holy Church Temples. And since the doors remain open until the Divine Liturgy is completed, people of other religions and heretics and ungodly and unfaithful and blasphemous and improperly dressed can enter absolutely undisturbed.

Yet, the Church Temple is a sacred place! It is the Angels' place, the Saints' place, the dreadful Golgotha's place, Christ's place, God's place. It is Heaven...

126. There was once a devout, ordinary Christian who during the Divine Liturgy, saw with the eyes of his soul, in a state of ecstasy and spiritual theoria, a dreadful vision!

Following the exclamation "the doors, the doors..." and as the "Symbol of Faith" was being recited, the Celebrant takes the "Aer", which covers the Holy Gifts, raises it up high and moves it on top of them rhythmically.

So, what did this devout Christian see? He saw in ecstasy the "Aer" being held by tens of angelic hands together with the Priest's hands, as they were moving it rhythmically!... And the hands of the Angels, for a moment started folding the "Aer" in a saintly manner and in great devoutness.

The moment the holy Veil of the "Aer" was being folded, it seemed that an invisible rock was being rolled "from the door of the tomb", while by the lips of the Angels one could hear a heavenly, honeyed chanting, which chanted the words "Lord have mercy... Lord have mercy... Lord have mercy..."

The Holy Bema and the dome of the Church Temple was filled with the presence of thousands of Cherubim and Seraphim, chanting and saying the Triumphant Hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Sabaoth...", while one could also hear the words "Glory to God in the Highest..." as well as other inconceivable hymns being chanted joyfully and festively from a large number of Angelic orders...[1]

Therefore, the Church Temple, which we see everyday, is a miniature of God's heavenly Temple. We can see heaven depicted with the dome. In its centre there is an icon of the Lord of heaven and earth, the All-sovereign, the Creator and Maker. The All-sovereign God emerges from up high, from the sky dome, and observes us people down on earth. He sees who is wise,

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[1] Personal notes

who is prudent, who obeys His will, who seeks Him with fervour, love, zeal, fear. He sees who loves Him by keeping His evangelical law and by cultivating the virtues. He notices whether the person who is inside the Church has a modest appearance, clothing, posture, movements. Whether he is attentive or whether he is absent-minded!

He is the One Who "searchest out the hearts and reins";[1] the Omniscient, the All - Seeing Mind, which "sees everything". He sees all, He knows all. He is the Lover of man, Meek and Humble! He is the Overseer of All, the Great, the Almighty, the Lord! "... who is, and who was, and who is to come...",[2] the Righteous Judge! A Righteous Judge for the wicked, the unrepentant and those who persist with unfaithfulness or heresy! However, for the faithful and humble, for those who repent and seek after His mercy, He is the Immortal Sun, the Life-Giver, the Saviour, the divine Blessedness, the Repose and Joy! That is why He holds a Gospel in His one hand. With this Gospel He will "judge the living and the dead". With the other hand He grants His Benediction; His Benediction to the whole creation, to the entire world and to us sinners, who are in the Church.

The All-sovereign is depicted surrounded by hexapteryga Seraphim and the many-eyed Cherubim, who, together with the whole Angelic world, transfer the wills of God for the salvation of men.

Next, further down the Prophets are depicted, for with their "prophetic eye" they saw and prophesized the heavenly, the inconceivable Mysteries of God, His Throne and Judgement.

Further down, the four circular triangles of the Dome, are the four Evangelists, who proclaimed the will of God to the world, revealed with their Gospels that, which had been foretold enigmatically and allegorically by the Prophets and which came true when "the fullness of the time was come",[3] with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. Each Evangelist is portrayed with an animal on his side, whereas Matthew is portrayed with a man on his side.

Why are animals portrayed next to the Evangelists and what do they symbolise?

- The man beside Matthew the Evangelist presents the human Birth of Christ the Saviour.
- The lion is portrayed near Mark the Evangelist in order to show the Lord's Majesty.
- The calf is presented next to Luke the Evangelist in order to indicate the Saviour's Sacrifice.
- And the eagle near John the Evangelist, for he is the one who is inspired by great theological ideas.

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[1] Psalm 7,10 [2] Apoc. 1,8 [3] Gal. 4,4

The four animals which are described by the Prophets Micah, Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and by Evangelist John's Apocalypse, are in fact many-eyed and hexapteryga. (The many-eyed feature reveals God's omniscience and their six-wings the agility and speed in which they move, so that they may execute the wills of God in a flash, vigilantly and carefully, since they symbolise the Angels).

The four animals do not lack logic. They look like animals, but they are spiritual beings. The first animal resembles the lion, in order to symbolize majestic royalty. The second one the calf, so that it may symbolise power, the third one has a human face, in order to symbolise the intellect and wisdom and the fourth one resembles the eagle that flies and symbolises speed and spiritual uplifting.

"The doors, the doors!"

By saying the words "the doors, the doors..." in a loud voice the priest allegorically urges us to take heed of our senses, our mind, our thoughts, for death passes through them. The Holy Scripture also assures it: death "has come up through your windows".[1] The "windows" are man's senses and thoughts. It is a crime when our minds still wander around cunning representations once we are inside the Church Temple. Therefore, we should close and seal all of our senses by means of the Jesus' prayer "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" and watchfulness.

If the Christian believer who attends Church services, manages to isolate himself from the material world, which surrounds him, then he is able - with the Grace of the Holy Spirit - to reach (in the soul's ecstasy) and see the Triumphant Church and God's unspeakable mysteries.

The exclamation **"The doors, the doors!..."** anagogically reveals to us life's as well as our world's temporariness but also our entrance into the bridal chambers of the Bridegroom Jesus Christ, which will once and for all take place in completion during the Second Coming, following the moment when the faithful will be separated most dreadfully from the unrepentant and the even more dreadful decision of the Righteous Judge our Lord Jesus Christ![2]

"In wisdom let us attend".

What are we supposed to be paying attention to here? To which "wisdom" should we focus our attention? Is it to the "wisdom" of the SYMBOL OF FAITH, or to the wisdom in the words "I BELIEVE"?

The **SYMBOL OF FAITH** is an offering of our own human wisdom to the wisdom of God. It is the response of the Militant Church of the faithful

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[1] Jer. 9,20

[2] Saint Maximus the Confessor, P.G. 91,693C and 696B

to the event of the incarnation of the Son and Word. It is man's thankful confession for the gift of his salvation by means of the Incarnation of the Son and Word "by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary", by means of the divine Teaching, the Sacrifice on the Cross, the Burial, the Resurrection, the Annunciation and His glorious Second Coming.

"The confession of the SYMBOL OF FAITH, which is recited by everyone, pre-states the mystical thanksgiving, which we are to offer in the life that will follow, for all those wonderful reasons and ways, with which the all wise Providence of God has made sure to save us. Through this thanksgiving the ones who are deemed worthy are presented as being grateful for the divine benefaction."[1]

This confession is a personal and responsible deed in the life of every faithful Christian. It is the cause of martyrdom and persecution in the life of the Church, for all those who want to live with consistency "in Christ Jesus"[2], shall be persecuted. They shall be persecuted by exterior and by interior enemies of the faith, by idolaters and by heretics, by the ungodly and the non-believers.

"The doors. The doors! In wisdom let us attend".

Following this exclamation, the recitation of confession begins:

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty... I also believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ... I also believe in the Holy Spirit... I believe and confess one Baptism for the remission of sins... I also believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church... I believe and look for the resurrection of the dead... I also believe in the life of the age to come. Amen".

The Holy Gifts are revealed and the priest lifts the Aer veil with both hands waving it gently over the gifts. At the same time, THE SYMBOL OF FAITH is recited on the one hand, in order to state the triumph of faith, which is our Lord Jesus Christ's Resurrection from the dead, as it is manifested with the earthquake, the rolling away of the stone and the empty tomb. While on the other hand, so that Christ the Lord, who according to His Deity is inconceivable and indescribable, may be revealed to the Church Militant. By means of the Holy Gifts, that is to say with His incarnation and His dreadful Sacrifice, God the Lord becomes known, as much as He wishes to be revealed in our hearts after Holy Communion. The Resurrection of Christ is revealed to us with an earthquake, according to the witnessing of Matthew the Evangelist: "And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door..."[3]

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[1] Saint Maximus the Confessor, P.G. 91,693C and 696B

[2] II Tim. 3,12

[3] Mat. 28,2

The simple movements of the Celebrant Priests when they uncover the Holy Gifts and wave the "Aer" over them, state the dreadful Mysteries. When are we to acquire a liturgical conscience, so that we may comprehend what is happening inside our Church?

When THE SYMBOL OF FAITH is being boomed, like it used to in the ancient Church, with one voice by all the Church-goers, it signifies that it is not fake, like the many "I believe" of nations and non-believers, but a true, live, eternal "I believe"!

127. There was once a reverend priest in a village who was serving the liturgy in an old country Church that had a very low ceiling. He said: "The doors, the doors; in wisdom let us attend", took the holy Veil of "Aer" in his hands and started waving it gently on top of the Holy Gifts, while the chanter was saying the Symbol of Faith.

All of a sudden, a lizard fell from the ceiling of the Holy Altar, which was low... And just where did it fall? Where do you think, inside the Holy Cup!!! The lizard drowned. However, this father, collected as he was, continued the Divine Liturgy, as if nothing had happened!

After he communed the two-three Christians who were celebrating the Divine Liturgy in the country Church, he also communed, and in the end... - Lord, Glory to Thy name! May glory be ascribed to the faith of that anonymous priest!- He consumed the remaining Holy Gifts, eating the lizard as well! Indeed! He ate the lizard, which had been poured however with the Blood of the God-Man our Lord Jesus Christ...

How can one not admire such faith! How can one not bow down before the reverence of such a celebrant! It was truly a living miracle! (Then they say that germs are being transmitted!) How can one not fall on one's knees and kiss the feet of this anonymous priest, who confessed his faith in Christ so bravely and actively during the dreadful Consumption of the remaining Holy Gifts, of that unforgettable, for him, Divine Liturgy![1]

We also quote a similar even more tragic incident:

128. Years ago, during my discussion with a certain Christian believer I was asked:

- In case a fly falls into the holy Cup, will you eat it?

And I answered:

-"YES" (for I had eaten one). He told me:

- Do you know what happened in my hometown in Psara, according to oral tradition? In one part of the island, called Fidolakos (Snake

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1 Paraskevopoulos Yervasios Archmindrite, *Interpretive Overview...*, ibid, p.199

Ditch), there is a monastery dedicated to Saint Matrona. In the past, that ditch had many snakes. Once, during the Divine Liturgy, a small snake fell inside the Holy Cup from the dome of the Holy Altar immediately after the Holy Conversion. The priest was scared and freaked out. What could he do? He could not throw it away, for it had been poured into the Holy Communion, and during the Consumption of the Holy Gifts, he was forced to eat it.

The Grace of God protected him, like so many others, so he was not harmed. Yet, psychologically he was really worn down. He was angry, and in the state he was in, he stepped outside (the Church Temple) and with loud painful cries asked Christ to make all the snakes disappear from the island. Therefore, 'til this day there aren't any snakes in Psara, not even one![1]

129. As opposed to someone else who, as a brother and concelebrant of mine had told me, due to the fact that he was suffering from diabetes, refused to consume the Holy Gifts and threw them into the special drain!...[2]

My brothers, Fathers and concelebrants and you faithful Christians, you can be the judges…

130. Around the year 1950 we went along with the Sunday School of Drama to Pravi, Kavala known today as Eleftheroupolis. In the evening a social event took place with songs, local Greek dances, Christian skits and so on. I sat somewhere near elderly fathers. I was somewhat attracted by the priesthood…

The whole village attended the events.

At one point the priest whom I sat next to, turning towards me says:

- Wouldn't it be better to gather all these young people, since there are so many of you, and say something about the Divine Liturgy? For, so many dreadful things happen in there about which our Christian, faithful fellow men, young and old, are completely in the dark.

- You are right, father, I said. The elder spiritual father in Sipsa tells us similar things. (Meaning Father George Karslidis)

- Ah, do you know him?

- Yes, I do! Tell me, however, my father, please, something great from the Divine Liturgy. Do you serve the liturgy here in Pravi or are

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1, 2 Personal notes

you in some village around here?

- Not, here, answered the father, but in Nikisiani.

- So, father John (this was the father's name) told me:

- I saw written in the Prayers for Holy Communion, as well as in many Liturgical Prayers and other Services, that God is a "consuming fire" and woe to those who are unworthy of partaking Holy Communion. It consumes all! While it burns the sins of the worthy one and consumes the devil. And I was not able to understand how God could be fire; and on the one hand illumine, caress the one who is worthy, while on the other hand, consume the one who is unworthy. I could not understand it and wondered about it for a long time.

Once, during the Divine Liturgy, following the Consecration of the Holy Gifts, when I stood up, I suddenly see fire, white flames coming out of the holy Cup! I got scared, I "stared wide-eyed" and kept saying: "My God, take this away from here now, for how will I be able to partake of Holy Communion later on?" Therefore, I interrupted the Divine Liturgy and did not continue further until this thing went away.

And finally, God who is Good did well and took it away... Since then, what can I say...! Would not this story be more beneficial compared to all this that is happening here, with the songs and the skits? Father John from Nikisiani concluded.[1]

I did not respond, for I was looking at him in awe with my mouth open.

Staretz Sampson very plainly describes a similar story to the one that Father John had told me:

131. "The Hieromartyr Metropolitan Benjamin Kazantsef, who was put to death by a firing squad, while he was once serving the Divine Liturgy, saw a flame of fire coming down towards the Holy Cup. It was something real. God showed it to us so that we may understand that he was not like any other Metropolitan. A huge flame of fire was on top of the holy Cup and inside the holy Cup! It was Divine Grace! Indeed, but it was not made visible to everyone. To some it was not revealed. For depending on their life not everyone is made worthy of seeing such things. Only to those whose souls' eyes are opened up. Only to those whose eyes are still humanly most pure. Even the concelebrant Archmindrites and Abbots not all of them saw it. They only saw... the noise. They heard the noise and realized that something peculiar was happening on the Holy Altar Table. But, in reality, nothing strange had occurred."[2]

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Meletios Metropolitan of Nikopolis, *translation of Staretz Sampson*, Preveza 1991, p.84

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty..."

The **Symbol of Faith**, which was written by two Ecumenical Synods, the **First** and the **Second**, has its own history.

The First Ecumenical Synod took place in Nicea of Bithynia the year 325, during the reign of Constantine the Great. Three - hundred and eighteen Fathers and Teachers of the Church, Martyrs and Confessors most of them, who suffered a great deal, while persecutions lasted, condemned Arius' terrible heresy, which said that there was a time when Christ, the Son of God did not exist. The words "In the beginning was the Word..."[1] were interpreted by him as the beginning of time. That is to say, Arius denied Christ's Divinity. He considered Him a creation, like today's millenarians, Arius' spiritual children, do. Saint Athanasius the Great, the deacon of the Patriarch of Alexandria at the time, was the leader of the First Ecumenical Synod.

Meanwhile the Second Ecumenical Synod took place in 381 in Constantinople, during the reign of Theodosius the Great, where one - hundred and fifty god-bearing Fathers and Teachers participated, under the guidance of Saint Gregory the Theologian. He condemned and excommunicated another heretic, Macedonios, who did not admit that the Holy Spirit is God.

The first word in the Holy Symbol of Faith is the verbs **"I believe"**. Today we believe in everything and everyone but our true God. We do not have faith neither in God's triple unity, nor in God the Word's incarnation, nor in Jesus Christ's Divinity, nor in the Holy Theotokos (Panagia), nor in the Saints and in their holy Relics, nor in miracles, nor in the most holy Mysteries, nor in the evangelical word, nor in the honorable veneration of the holy icons. We believe in everything but God and His revelation. Nevertheless, there is no end to the matters of the faith.

The Dogmas that are included in the Symbol of Faith are all certain, true, live and real. They are truths that offer eternal life! This is why, what is said and taught, either in writing or orally, and is not in accordance to the terms of the SYMBOL OF FAITH, is all heresy and fallacy.

Content and blessed are all those who believe and live according to the basic and eternal truths, that are included in THE SYMBOL OF FAITH! And when they reach the end of their lives, may the words "I BELIEVE" lock and seal it.

132. Many years ago, my Elder spiritual father had told me about a monk's situation, who on the night of the Resurrection, while he was next to the Abbot of the Monastery and while the troparion "Christ is Risen" was being chanted ten times, he was ordered to go to the ossuary of the reposed monks, to proclaim "Christ is Risen".

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[1] Jn. 1,1

He immediately went to the ossuary, entered with his candle lit and said:

- Brothers and fathers, my Elder spiritual father has ordered me to announce you with a heavenly cry: CHRIST IS RISEN!

Oh! miraculously all the bones together with the monks' holy skulls rose one meter high! They stood still for a few minutes and went back to their places!

This is the miracle of faith and the preannouncement of the resurrection of the dead. (The incident that everyone is well aware of occurred in the Holy Monastery of Saint Paul on Mount Athos.)[1]

In certain places, they are used to kneeling near the bed of the person who is in death throes and they recite the Symbol of Faith, "Our Father", "It is truly meet" in a spirit of compunction. Moreover, they read the Psalter, the New Testament, they even recommend that the dying person say the Jesus' prayer "Lord, have mercy... my Holy Theotokos (Panagia), help me".

[1] Personal notes

8. THE HOLY ANAPHORA

Following the word "amen", which must also be said in a loud cry, not only by the chanter but also by the whole laity, the deacon or priest addresses the following exhortation:

♦ "LET US STAND ARIGHT. LET US STAND WITH FEAR. LET US ATTEND, THAT WE MAY OFFER THE HOLY OBLATION IN PEACE"

There are a large number of Angels that form nine battalions and brigades, in which - according to the Fathers - the Archangels are the leaders. Names of Archangels which are commemorated in the Holy Scripture are Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. They are also called Marshals. Apart from the three Archangels that we mentioned previously, there was also another Archangel, called Lucifer due to his brightness. However, this Archangel, says the Prophet Isaiah,[1] did not remain faithful and dedicated to God. He fell from his height due to his pride. Lucifer took pride in saying "I will go up to heaven, I will set my throne above the stars of heaven... I will be like the Most High".[2]

Therefore, as soon as he started thinking proud, he started falling from the height of his glory, tumbling into chaos, being transformed from an Angel of light, into an angel of darkness, satan. In fact, while he was falling from heaven he inveigled to his side an even larger number of angels, who formed his host. This is not a lie. It is not a fantastic story, but a terrifying event, which took place in the heavenly world. It is an event that Christ Himself testifies when He says, "I beheld satan as lightning fall from heaven".[3]

In fact, the moment when Lucifer was falling dragging along a large number of angels, Archangel Michael at the same time sounded to the other Angels with his archangelic trumpet. "Let us stand aright," cried Archangel Michael that tragic moment when Lucifer was falling and this is what the priest of the Most High cries to the faithful Christians who are attending the liturgy: "Let us stand aright", an archangelic voice that is also the Apostle

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[1] Is. 14,12 [2] Is. 14,13-14 [3] Luk. 10,18

Paul's God - inspired exhortation, which says, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling".[1] Furthermore, it is also the voice of Christ Himself: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation...".[2] However, if there is a special moment when we must hear the words "let us stand aright" in a more powerful way, it is when the priest is getting ready to serve the fearful Mystery of the Divine Eucharist.

♦ "Let us stand aright. Let us stand with fear. Let us attend, that we may offer the Holy Oblation in peace".

"Anaphora" is what we call the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, for from below we are brought upwards, thus, we ascend. ("Anaphora" is ascension.) What follows the words "Let us stand aright" is called "Holy Anaphora".

With our heart's divine fear and profound reverence, we should focus on that which is to take place shortly. This is what the Celebrant Priest's exclamation states why? For, let us not forget that the Angels and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, are present around the Holy Altar Table and inside the Church Table with fear and trembling! With all these angelic Powers we are all going - in a while - to co-unite, so that we may offer together with them our rational worship towards the Lord, our God-Man and Savior Jesus Christ, Who siteth on the throne of Glory in heaven.

When we serve the Divine Liturgy, we are inside the Holy Church Table and on earth. Nevertheless, the bloodless Sacrifice will ascend from this earthly Church Table and be ascribed to the heavenly Church, to the Church of God's Kingdom. This is why it is called "Holy Anaphora"! For our rational worship and sacrifice will be brought from our earthly Altar to the most heavenly Altar. The Altar on earth becomes one with the one in heaven!

As the Lord and God is being served by us, His unworthy celebrants, who bear a corruptible and sinful flesh, He is invisibly and inconceivably present as "the offered and the offerer", as the Great Archpriest, Whom all the heavenly Angelic orders escort and venerate and worship.

We are invited to be attentive to and honor this Holy Anaphora, with fear and trembling. Yes, be attentive to It, for It will be taken to the heavens in the company of a host of Angels. Who shall take the Holy Anaphora to the heavens? This constitutes an inconceivable and splendid miracle indeed! - The Son and Word as our own representative and intercessor will take our anaphora to the heavens. For He is "the offered and the offerer", the Great Archpriest; and will offer It to God - the Father of Light, One that was the Ancient of days, incense acceptable, an Anaphora which is holy...

The Holy Church is a place of Angels, a place of Archangels, the Kingdom of God, heaven itself. **Saint John Chrysostom** says that even if so-

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[1] Philip. 2,12 [2] Mat. 26,41

meone opened the doors of heaven and led you there to see your father or brother, you would not dare speak to them, similarly, none other than spiritual readings and Prayers should be uttered here. For the Church is also heaven".[1] And in heaven reigns God's undisturbed tranquility, God's peace, "which surpasses all understanding", which guards everything in the heavenly city of Jerusalem Above. Turmoil, tumult, and upheaval do not belong there.

If our heart is troubled, if our understanding is darkened, if our thoughts are confused during the Divine Worship and Holy Anaphora and also the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts, this would mean that we are conscience - stricken and thus accused that somewhere along the way we are guilty. Moreover, if this is true, then the Grace of God moves away from us. It dislocates us it even leads us out of the Church. It denies us, for we lack the ultimate love towards God and our neighbor.

The response given by the people of God to the celebrant's exhortation to the faithful to offer the Holy Anaphora "in peace" is

♦ "A MERCY OF PEACE, A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE"

So that our sacrifice is "a sacrifice of praise", that is to say a sacrifice acceptable to God, our hearts should be filled with "a mercy of peace", in other words, with love in practice, with tender mercies, with forgiveness and peace, with consent and understanding.

By addressing the Jews through the voice of the Prophet Hosea, God and later the Lord Christ Himself, asked for "mercy rather than sacrifice".[2] Therefore, the "sacrifice of praise" would mean the rational worship, which we must offer with gratitude and thanksgiving towards God, while we should have previously settled our differences with our neighbor.

However, the One and Only Sacrifice was the one that our Lord Jesus Christ offered towards God - the Father on the Holy Cross. We are offering this sacrifice now, still bloodlessly and rationally, in the Divine Liturgy. And through the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, we are made of "the same blood and of the same body" in Christ Jesus; of the same body with Christ Who is God - Man, so that we are also able to offer in turn, ourselves as a rational and acceptable sacrifice towards God.

When we are at the entrance and we are stepping on the Church's doorstep, in order to enter the royal hall of the Holy Anaphora, the celebrant cries and recommends that we may "stand aright", but also wishes us peace: "That we may offer the holy oblation in peace". Thus, we all the people answer and confirm that we proceed in order to partake of Christ Jesus' continual Sacrifice, being at peace with God, with ourselves and among us.

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[1] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.253

[2] Hosea 6,6 and Mat. 9,13

From the beginning of the Church service, we ask God for mercy and now is the time to confirm that we offer God nothing but mercy and peace in our heart, fondness and a loving mood towards one another. For no other kind of sacrifice is acceptable to God. In addition, loving your neighbor is a sacrifice. It is a sacrifice! Those who really love know it.

The great sacrifice, wich was offered once and for all and continues to be offered in the Church today, in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in which we participate with a heart filled with love and peace.

The Holy Gifts are not offered only in the Altar that is on earth, but the are also lifted up to the most heavenly Altar. The Militant Church on earth serves and worships. Similarly, the Triumphant Church offers her own Worship, Glory and Divine Thanksgiving unto the ages of ages.

♦ "LET US STAND ARIGHT. LET US STAND WITH FEAR".

The Divine Liturgy proceeds, it ascends to the top of Golgotha. Shortly, the bloodless Sacrifice will take place!!! Sacrifice is considered that astonishing moment, where the Bread and Wine through priesthood become the Body and Blood of Christ! This is the Miracle of Miracles, which takes place in Divine Worship. The Holy Spirit through the Priesthood descends and makes the Divine Conversion. Those who have steadfast faith and simplicity at heart feel and experience it. It is moreover experienced by those who are humble and whose life, soul and body is immaculate!

133. When I was a young high school graduate, still serving most unworthily the Holy Altar of the Holy Church in Drama dedicated to the Entrance of the Holy Theotokos, Father Theodore, who was the priest at the time, told me that in Asia Minor before the year 1920 he had met a Priest who had great reverence. Furthermore, he had never performed the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts, if he had not previously seen an all-white, glowing Dove, immersed in a dazzling white light, which came and stood still over the Holy Gifts. After the Holy Gifts had been Sanctified, the priest waited for a while only to see the Holy Altar glimmering and the Dove vanishing.

Once the Dove did not appear... so, he waited for it... Along with him, the whole village waited since it was Christmas....

Time went by and that reverend Priest would not perform the Conversion, for he did not know of any other way! This was the only way he knew! This was the only way he experienced! This all-white Dove would come every time the Conversion and Sanctification of the Holy Gifts was about to take place. He started weeping... (May we have his blessing and intercessions from the heavens.)

Just then, he came out to the Beautiful Gate and told the congregation:

- The Holy Spirit is not descending... Forgive me, my co-villagers, for I am a sinner! Forgive me, forgive me..., I will be waiting...

What else could the villagers do, they also waited with him.

Shortly after the Priest saw the Dove, like a lightning descending from the dome of the Church and standing as always, over of the Holy Gifts... all Light, all Glory!...

That holy father said:

-It has come! And he turned his back in simplicity, performed the Sanctification and proceeded to serve the Divine Liturgy of Christmas.[1]

For us also every time the Divine Service is performed, at a certain point this exciting moment of Sanctification arrives. Shortly before this moment arrives, the priest invites the faithful Christians to focus their attention by saying: "The doors, the doors..." and after a while, again, we say, "Let us stand aright. Let us stand with fear..." During these moments, faith and love in practice, forbearance, tolerance and forgiveness should dominate ...

In Orthodox Worship, there is no room for those who have not been baptized or for other religious denominations. There is also no room for non - believers, heretics, antichrists, blasphemers, the ungodly, the masons, the satanists, nor for those whose heart is as hard as a rock and where malice, revenge, fury, hatred, cruelty, hard-heartedness reigns. The Mystery of Divine Worship is a hymn of love and peace. It is a "Sacrifice of praise"!

Immediately after the words "mercy of peace, sacrifice of praise", the priest who is serving the liturgy, comes out to the Beautiful Gate and blesses the people with the sign of the cross with his hand (in the past the priest would bless by using the "Aer"). Alternatively, in case a bishop serves the liturgy, he blesses with the blessing Cross, which is on the Holy Altar Table, and says:

♦ "THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE LOVE OF GOD THE FATHER AND THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BE WITH YOU ALL"

This is a special triune blessing taken from Apostle Paul.[2] "The Apostle Paul's triune blessing, according to an ancient **Ecclesiastic Author**, is the introduction to the mystical Liturgy of all the Churches". In other words, the mystical Liturgy commences in all the Churches in this way (for the Holy Anaphora starts now!) We should pay special attention to this ancient

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[1] Personal notes

[2] II Cor. 13,14

Ecclesiastic Author's testimony: What does he mean exactly when he writes that the Apostle Paul's blessing in all the Churches is "the introduction to the mystical Liturgy"?

He might mean two things:

- Either that the mystical part of the Divine Liturgy commences now, in which case the Catechumens as well as those who had not been uninitiated or baptized, the ungodly, the heretics etc. could not take part.
- Alternatively, that the Divine Mystery is to take place now.[1]

However, both tell us the same thing that the Holy Anaphora is the most holy part of the Divine Liturgy, for from now on it is the "Holy of Holies" of Divine Worship.

What is taking place in the Divine Eucharist is not a mere demonstration let alone a theatrical performance. (While a bishop was serving the Divine Liturgy, he once confessed to me: we are all giving a theatrical performance, for unfortunately we are not participating in all the great things that are taking place here). It is the same exact Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Golgotha - yet bloodless - which continues in the Church by means of His command. "...this do in remembrance of me".[2] This is why we say that the Divine Liturgy is at the same time a remembrance.

At this moment, the Celebrant priest is a unique person compared to all the faithful and has been granted special Grace and the command to impart the three great gifts of God to the Christian Church goers: Grace, Love and the Communion of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas in a particular way attributes these good things to each one of the blessed Hypostases: To the Son Grace, to the Father love and to the Holy Spirit Communion. The Son, without us having contributed to anything, but while we are still guilty towards Him, gave Himself a Savior for us. For He died for our sake even though we are still impious. Therefore, His Providence is our Grace. Since, the Father through His Son's Passions was reconciled with the human race and embraced His "adversaries", therefore, what He did for us, is called love. Because the one who is "rich in mercy" needed to impart His good things to the enemies, with whom He reconciled, this was realized through the Holy Spirit with Its descent to the Apostles. Therefore, the goodness of the Holy Spirit towards people is called Communion".[3]

The faithful Christian can sense the Holy Spirit. It informs him that he is God's child, made "in His own image" and "likeness". His heart, which is illumined by the Holy Spirit, hears a mystical voice: "Abba, Father".[4]

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozanis, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid, p.313-314

[2] Luk. 22,19

[3] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, ibid, p 89-90

[4] Gal. 4,6

Thus, in Divine Worship we are made partakers of the gifts of the Holy Trinity: From the source - which is the love of God the Father - through the way and the door - which is the Grace of the Son and Word - the Communion of the Holy Spirit comes to all the Church-going Christians and to each one separately. Hence:

- God's providence for our salvation is "grace" (an offering, a gift).
- His offering as Sacrifice on the Cross is called and is also "love".
- In addition, the free sharing of God's blessed goods through the Holy Spirit is called "communion"!

And **Saint Nicholas Cabasilas** questions: "Since all the goods and triune gifts were given to the people through God's incarnation in the Person of Christ Jesus - those, of course, who received Him and believed in Him - is it necessary at this point in the Divine Liturgy to have this apostolic blessing and wish?" Therefore, he answers: "Certainly, so that we may not lose themm, since we received them, and in order to hold on to them for the rest of our lives. This is why the priest does not say: May they be given to you all, for they have already been given, but wishes instead: "be with you all" may they remain with you.[1]

The Divine Liturgy is man's communion with the Grace of the Triune God. "Our life is granted by God the Father through Christ Jesus and in the Holy Spirit" as **Saint Basil the Great** says and assures. Thus, that which enlivens the Christian is the offering of the All Holy Trinity.[2]

"However, God the Father is also the starting point for every blessing and grace and power and illumination and joy and peace and glory which descends through the Son and Word and is made perfect by the Most Holy Spirit" according to **Saint Gregory of Nyssa**, the brother of Saint Basil the Great.[3] These blessings and triune gifts are lavishly granted in Divine Worship through Holy Communion.

The interpretation of the apostolic blessing at the same time proclaims the Dogma of the Holy Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the three Persons of Divinity work together for man's salvation.

134. Father Daniel the Hesychast would receive many gifts, many blessings and rich triune charismas every day during the Divine Liturgy which he served on a daily basis, on Mount Athos. He served the liturgy every day, even during Great Lent, for sixty consecutive years. I had heard many things about this ascetic Celebrant of the Most High. He was an angel on earth who served the liturgy together with the Angels in an angelic way.

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.90

[2] Saint Basil the Great, P.G. 29,664C

[3] Saint Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 45,125C

Elder Joseph the Cave Dweller and Hesychast (Hermit), together with his step-brother, the Elder Arsenios, would walk for hours, in order to see and enjoy him while he was serving the liturgy. They did not ask for anything more but to be able to see him serve the liturgy! He would practise hesychasm and serve the liturgy in the Cave of Saint Peter the Athonite.

The Hagiorite Spiritual fathers write and say that he was a "liturgical spirit" and a "flame of fire", according to the Psalter: "Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire".[1]

Those who had the chance to attend even one of his Divine Liturgies would confess that it was a real mystagogy (divine service). A descent of Heavenly Worship down to earth, there, in the cave, where Father Daniel served the liturgy. However, simultaneously it was a real ascent of the Altar on earth to heavenly Worship, to the heavenly Altar of Jerusalem Above.

He served the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great every day so that it could last longer, even though we know that we serve it only ten times a year. He would read the Prayers slowly - slowly, meaningfully and with a spirit of devoutness. He would not hurry at all. By whom would he be rushed and for what reason? He had the whole night - and every night- to himself!

Devoutness brought about lots of silent and most "sweet flowing" tears; the joy of devoutness and the many tears were so overwhelming that he would cease the exclamations and the reading of the Prayers. His devoutness was such that he would not utter the words "Through the prayers...", unless his tears turned the ground of soil of his godly-made cave into mud!

For sixty consecutive years, he served the liturgy every day, ceaselessly, without any gap; not even one! In fact, he rested in peace in a holy way after the end of his last Divine Liturgy, when he went to get some rest. For, he was also accustomed to withdrawing for one-two hours in order to enjoy the grandeur of the divine Gifts, which were granted to him during Divine Worship.

Every Divine Liturgy would last for many hours. Blessed were the moments and hours when Father Daniel's mind would be caught up to the Heavenly Worship. His prayers and supplications, which were filled with weeping and tearing, would fill God's creation with heavenly beauty (this is what the fathers say about him!). He would also strengthen the faith of weak Christians in the world, he would illuminate those who were worried, console those who were in distress, protect the monks, shield the striving faithful Christians... and with the multitude of his daily tearing and weeping he would lead us sinners to salvation!

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[1] Psalm. 103,5

He was one of the few of each generation, who would make the world angel like![1]

♦ "The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all".

I believe that, when Father Daniel used to say this, the completely triune blessing of God would pass through his hands to the entire world.

This triune blessing is also apostolic, for Paul, the Apostle of Nations, first declared and wrote it. Our Church placed it in the introduction of the Holy Anaphora in the great bloodless Sacrifice of Divine Worship. Since then an endless number of hosts of priests and bishops have exclaimed it. Actually, many times miraculous energies were and are revealed, according to the Synaxarion and Gerondikon.

The Grace of the triune blessing is not only of our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is also of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. Love is not only of the Father, but it is also of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Communion is not only of the Holy Spirit, but it is also of the Father and of the Son. For, according to our faith's Triune Dogma, God is One in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A Triune God.

In this introduction of the Holy Anaphora, there is a dramatic dialogue. A dialogue between the Celebrant Priest and the Church-going Christians, through the holy chanters:

In the words **"Let us stand aright. Let us stand with fear. Let us attend, that we may offer the holy oblation in peace"**, the people respond: **"A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise"**.

Immediately after this triune apostolic blessing the people answer:

"And with thy spirit".

That is to say, we also wish you what you wished for us. Even though we celebrants are not worthy of our great mission, nevertheless, Divine Grace shall never cease to be transmitted in order to water and cool the souls of Christians. The priest is an instrument in the hands of our Holy God. God borrows the priest's mouth, his eyes and hands, and consummates the Mysteries. Whoever the celebrant may be, however unworthy, the Mysteries are being realized and are valid. Yet, none of us priests has the right to make a distinction between the ethos of his private life and his service in the

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[1] Ioannikios Archmindrite, *Athonite Gerondikon*, ibid, p.194, 208, 240

Church. Wherever he may go, whatever he may do, however he may clothe himself, however he may behave and converse, he is first of all and above all A PRIEST. He is a Celebrant of the Most High.

Grace is granted to the people of God, it is also granted to the priest, to the whole fullness of the Church, which consists of clergy and laity. Grace to all, Love to all, Communion of the Holy Spirit to all. Divine Worship's common spiritual gifts.

♦ "AND WITH THY SPIRIT"

What kind of response coming from the churchgoers is proper to the Celebrant priest's triune blessing? The words "And with thy spirit" is the only response that fulfills every real need as it means: May the same Divine Grace, the same Divine love, the same Communion of the Holy Spirit, return to your soul, which has become all spirit and has turned upwards, towards the throne of God's Majesty.

These moments are dreadful, shocking, light bearing. Nevertheless, we are poor, empty, void and frozen! And instead of having the Grace of the Holy Spirit reign over our inner being, passions, pettiness, selfishness, wickedness, envy, malice... unfortunately are the ones that dominate. When however, we are fulfilled and filled by the Love of God the Father, by the Grace of Jesus Christ and by the communion of the Holy Spirit, then our souls, as spirits, are in the heavens, are experiencing the heavenly as the Angels and are enjoying, in a noetic and spiritual way, the unseemly Mysteries of God. "Standing in the temple of thy glory, we think that we are in heaven".

The Celebrant Priest's triune apostolic blessing and the laity's response "and with thy spirit", not only grants us the gifts of Heaven in abundance, but it also compels us to become all spirit, all light... Light bearers and not quenchers. Amen.

135. Father Paisios, a well-known Monk, was once narrating that during the great famine of 1917 the Monks in the Monastery of Iviron, had reduced their hospitality a great deal after seeing that the Monastery's storeroom was being emptied. In fact, one of the heads was so mean that he insisted that they interrupt it entirely. As a result, Christ ceased every blessing. This is when the fathers started being hungry and complaining to Christ and the All Holy (Panagia) that they do not take care of their Monastery anymore. Unfortunately, they had not realized that they were the ones who were at fault.

Therefore, one day Christ appeared to the Monastery's porter as a poor man in rags asking him for some bread and the doorman sadly told Him:

- My brother, we do not have any, this is why we do not offer any hospitality. Wait a minute, so I can bring you the small piece that I ha-

ve kept for myself in my cell.

He rushed into his cell, brought the bread, he had kept for himself and gave it to Him. Nevertheless, the Poor Man's countenance started glowing before him.

After he had taken the bread, the Poor Man told the porter:

- Do you know why there is such misery in your Monastery? It is because you chased two away from your Monastery the "giving" and "receiving".

- Who? Asked the porter.

- "Giving" and "receiving".

After he had uttered these words, the Poor Man vanished spreading a glow, which dazzled the porter. Then shocked and scared as he was he rushed to the Monastery's headmen (for it was idiorrythmic) and narrated to them the event.

At first, the fathers were trying to figure out which people they had sent away. After however, they realized that these words are evangelical, and therefore that Poor Man was Christ!

In 1959 I also had heard a similar story by a Hermit, Father Joakeim at Karyes on Mount Athos. He told me about the value of mercifulness, in a practical and spiritual sense, in relationship to Holy Communion:

"The more you offer your mercy from the little that you have, Father Joakeim used to tell me, the more and much more talents you shall be receiving -both material and spiritual- especially when you serve the liturgy and in fact when you partake of the immaculate Mysteries.

The same thing occurred to the porter of the Monastery of Iviron in 1917. When he received Holy Communion the next day, he became all light, all - glowing and illumined. He sensed Holy Communion spreading divine joy everywhere, in his whole being. He was captivated by extreme humility and contrition. He was weeping but did not khow why. And then he started being ashamed of Christ his Savior and Lord who deigned to fill him with so many inconceivable gifts".

Father Joakeim concluded by saying:

- Deacon, give it a try, and you will see it in practice...

The rest of the story following this incident is known. The fathers repented for their fault and as soon as they started giving to the poor, to the monks and to the laity from the little that they had, God's blessings started coming forth richly, concludes Father Paisios.[1]

I mentioned this incident not only to say that we ought to be hospitable and merciful to everyone, but also because that monk had combined mate-

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[1] The Elder Paisios the Aghiorite, *Hagiorite Fathers...*, ibid, p.135

rialistic mercifulness with spiritual mercifulness in offering to his neighbor, as far as Holy Communion is concerned, which is the central part of the Divine Liturgy.

♦ "LET US LIFT UP OUR HEARTS"

The priest exclaims and the people respond: **"We lift them up unto the Lord"**.

In this dramatic dialogue, precisely we are experiencing in a spiritual sense the occurrence of the Transformation. The mind is being caught up, the heart is being caught up, and the whole person is being caught up and transformed. Merely transformed in the Holy Spirit by the triune apostolic blessing, which has proceeded, the soul may ascend "a high mountain",[1] from where he will see and enjoy the master and immortal Table of Eternal Life. To put it more plainly, during the miracle of liturgical metamorphosis, the all-mighty triune Grace of Christ through the words "let us lift up our hearts", grabs us from within the Church, where we are attending the liturgy, and "brings [us] up" in other words elevates us, to the high mountain of the Love of God the Father, where the Throne of His divine Majesty is found! There the mystery of Communion of the Holy Spirit is being consummated. The absolute sense of this Communion, that of Grace and Love, of the godly communion of the inconceivable Mystery, is experienced by a certain group of cleansed and holy priests and by divinely revered Christians for only a few moments!...

The soul who is attending the liturgy has to long for this ascension, with all its might. Thus, the more humble and sincere and genuine her longing, her desire is, so much and greater will be the gifts of the inner spiritual metamorphosis; metamorphosis of the senses even, but also of the whole body. The person as a whole is magnified and radiant inside out!

"Let us lift up our hearts". The Celebrant Priest lifts up his arms pointing upwards, towards the Church's dome, where the Lord God the Almighty is, where the summit of mount Tabor is, where the mystical chamber, in which the mystical spiritual union and our soul's transfiguration with Christ the Savior is about to take place! Can this place be defined? No. It is - in a way - a heavenly ladder, which is made firm inside the Church, in the Altar on earth, and whose other end cannot be seen, for its top is invisible and unapproachable to our eyes.

In addition, we can see that a continuous movement, along with the Angels, characterizes those officiating priests, who are holy. They move from one Altar to the other; from this Holy Altar, to the Worship of the Triumphant Church, that is to the VIEWING OF the uncreated Light of the threesun Divinity. When the νοῦς, (the nous) and the heart return from this

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[1] Mark 9,2

viewing of the divine Beauty inside the Church, it sees this most holy Altar and the whole Church filled with Light. For Christ Himself, the Light of the world that presents and offers His light-giving Body is on top of the Holy Altar, so that the Christians may be fed and the world may be saved, that we may be fed says **Saint Gregory Palamas**.[1]

All these superior and spiritual notions are included in the exclamation: **"Let us lift up our hearts"**. In a few seconds, in a continuous movement, the soul ascends very high. Therefore, the higher it ascends the more spiritual height it longs for.

"Let us lift up our hearts", and our soul is consumed by the desire to ascend; for our soul knows very well, in other words, it is informed in a good and undeluded way, that it shall shortly satisfy its hunger with the food of incorruption, Holy Communion!

As a Celebrant Priest, **Saint Symeon the New Theologian** must have continuously lived in the viewing of the divine beauty of the heavenly Altar. His written texts inform us about it. So, at one point he writes:"At times it is quite difficult for me to comprehend which of the two I take most pleasure in: In the joy - creating ray of divine glow, by viewing the three-sun Divinity, or in the food of Holy Communion, that is in my mouth? Is it the divine taste in my mouth or the noetic viewing? My heart with warm zeal desires to view divine beauty, however at the same time it is attracted by and is under the spiritual influence of the inexpressible sweetness of Holy Communion, which commences from my mouth. Which one is it? For the more, I look to the uncreated Light of Divine Grace the more I take pleasure and rejoice in the indescribable blessed taste of Holy Communion.

Thus, I am never filled by the viewing of the divine rays of the three - sun Divinity, nor am I filled by the food and drink of Jesus Christ's Body and Blood. For, when it seems to me that the former fills me, it is then when I begin to thirst unquenchably for the latter. Therefore, I am once again and always hungry and thirsty".[2] We most certainly do not understand these things at all, for we do not have the same taste, we do not have the same spiritual sensors. Thus, we remain void, deaf, cold, and insensitive.

"Let us lift up our hearts". The soul ascends to meet her Savior our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to make this ascension possible she has to have experienced the pain of virtues, the labor of the commandments and the forcing of the disposition in one's heart. However, here, in the Divine Liturgy, labor becomes rest, pain redemption and forcefulness, the power of God!

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[1] Saint Gregory Palamas, *Sermon III*, GCF 2,202

[2] Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Philokalia of the Neptic Fathers*..., Thessalonica 1988, vol. 19B, p.387

What does it mean to lift up our hearts?

In the language of the Church, **what do we mean by "heart"**?

It is the natural centre of man's organic life. Simultaneously however it is the center of our being, in which our communion and union with the Most Holy God takes place. That is to say, it is this spiritual place, where the completely spiritual life is being developed and in which the uncreated energy of the three-sun Divinity acts.

Even among Christians, the existence of the heart -as our Church is spiritually analyzing it- is completely unknown due to many reasons: First, our passions are to blame (the nous is darkened). What is also to blame is the fact that we ignore the Holy Scripture as well as the Dogmas of our faith and all the spiritual life. What is to blame is the total absence from the most holy Mysteries. What are to blame are the lack of experience and finally the total neglect of prayer of the nous towards the area where the heart is situated, the way the Fathers of Watchfulness have instructed.

There are many of those who ask and ask again and wish to learn, to be informed and most of all to experience the noetic prayer of the heart, mainly due to a selfish urge of loving oneself that exclusively aims at its fruits without making the effort to labor for the cleansing from their passions.

The prayer of the heart takes a lot of effort! We do not strive to make the effort to place the nous in the heart, since with the passions we have we shall encounter darkness, fallacy and spiritual perversion. Instead of Grace and divine Light we shall encounter demonic lights.

A first presupposition for succeeding in noetic prayer, as it has been analyzed by the Fathers, is to be able to make our neighbor's but every neighbor's pain our own; above all our enemy's! May the pain and temptation of the person who accuses us falsely, who treats us unjustly, and dishonors us, also become our own agony. Then there is the effort that we make in order to be released from the large number of passions, to acquire a proper liturgical conscience, to partake in the most holy Mysteries, to obey the commandments, to cultivate the virtues and others. In the end, the experience of Divine Grace will come.

The Grace of our Holy God works in man's heart in a mystical and silent way for his salvation, provided that he also wants it, makes the effort, strives, when he has the disposition in his heart and forces himself, when he weeps and truly repents.

The ever-memorable **father Sophrony of Essex** says that the heart of a Christian is the field of spiritual battles. And he who loves entering his heart through noetic prayer- that is to make the nous go down to the heart, in other words inside it - can easily comprehend David's word in the psalm: "A man shall draw nigh, and the heart is deep".[1] The heart becomes an end-

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[1] Psalm 63,7

less ocean. Moreover, if you were to find yourself in the middle of the ocean, you would vanish! - What are you worth when you are inside the ocean? - Likewise, you also vanish when you enter inside the heart through noetic prayer.

Through the Apostle Peter, the Holy Scriptures names the heart the hidden man "the hidden man of the heart".[1] And later on, he says that it is also, where God is glorified and sanctified: "...but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts".[2] This verse reveals that the clean and humble heart is God's Church and Holy Altar. The priest is the mind. The heart resembles a hall, where the mind holds a reception for the Lord. In there the betrothal of the Holy Spirit takes place; God is the One who "hath... given the betrothal of the Spirit in our hearts",[3] says the holy Paul.

Innumerable are the verses in the Holy Scriptures that refer to the heart, with a variety of spiritual attributes and images. However, many of these images of the heart are dark and ugly. For, the heart apart from the Holy Temple of God, Holy Table and Holy Altar, unfortunately, is also an unnatural center, a center for sin; for "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies".[4]

The heart is very easily concealed with the cover of two terrible passions, that of ignorance and oblivion. Moreover, the heart is distinguished by its stiffneckedness:"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears..."[5] the Archdeacon and First - Martyr Stephen told the Jews.

We also locate two more kinds of uncleanness in the area of the heart:

- **Firstly**, the uncleanness of pride, which threw Lucifer away and made him a demon, satan, devil, and
- **Secondly**, adultery, debauchery and the mind's filth.

Thus, our heart must be cured from all the illnesses caused by our passions, and only then, clean and immaculate would it be able to ascend to the heavenly Altar during the Divine Liturgy. The nous easily comes down to a clean and immaculate heart.

By "heart", we mean something very important when we hear it in the Divine Liturgy. We mean the completely esoteric world hidden in man. It is an endless and invisible world. "Heart" is man's thought, feeling, will. It is the mind, the soul... It is his "in the image."

"Let us lift up our hearts", says the priest. Thus, the people who hear this sacred commandment, through the holy chanters respond:

♦ "WE LIFT THEM UP UNTO THE LORD"

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[1] I Peter 3,4 [2] I Peter 3,15 [3] II Cor. 1,22
[4] Mat. 15,19 [5] Acts 7,51

With their response, the faithful Christians who are attending the liturgy assure the Celebrant Priest that they have already ascended heavenly heights, to reach God's Throne. Our hearts, they tell him are where Christ is, to the right of God the Father. In addition, the Celebrant Priest silently, in his noetic faculty, listens to the voice that urges him to proceed to serve the most divine Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

136. Once, during my visit to Saint David's Monastery in Evoia, the ever-memorable Father Iakovos, this holy Priest and Celebrant of the Most High told me the following in private:

"Our Christian people are unfortunately spiritually blind and are not able to see what takes place in the Divine Liturgy.

Once I was serving the liturgy but could not do the Great Entrance. During the Cherubic hymn, I was immobilized before the Holy Altar, unable to move by what I saw... One vision of God (theoria) came after another.

- My father, what were you able to see?

I asked him in amazement. But he would not answer and continued:

- The chanter would continuously repeat, "That we may receive the King of all..." therefore, I suddenly feel someone pushing me on the shoulder and taking me to the Sanctuary.

I was under the impression that it was the chanter so I said to myself "The blessed one! How can he be so irreverent! How dare he enter from the Beautiful Gate and push me?"

So, I turn my head and see a huge wing, which the Archangel had passed around my shoulder and was guiding me to do the Great Entrance!

What is actually going on here in the Sanctuary during the Divine Liturgy cannot be described..."

That is approximately, what he told me while I was admiring ...

In a book that the fathers of the Monastery published, Father Iakovos describes approximately the same liturgical vision and adds:

"Most of the time I do not have the strength to see what I see and so I sit on the chair, as a result, certain concelebrants of mine think that something is wrong with my health and are worried..., but they do not know what I see and hear...

My child, it is amazing how the Angels flap their wings! How they flap their wings!

As soon as the Priest says "Through the prayers..." the heavenly Powers depart and there is absolute silence inside the Sanctuary..."[1]

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[1] The Holy Monastery of Saint David, *A Holy Gerondas, the ever-memorable Father Iakovos*, The Holy Monastery of Saint David of Evoia publications, 1993, p.81

The chanters' answer to the priest's exhortation "Let us lift up our hearts" is "We lift them up unto the Lord."

We tell the priest that our hearts are near the Lord. In reality, however we are discussing and whispering trivial things during this same hour: What is one wearing, how the other is moving, how this person is making the sign of the Cross -how hypocritical one can be!- What happened to that person and the other? **Saint John Chrysostom** asks, "Man, what are you doing? When the priest said, "Let us lift up our hearts", did you not promise by saying "We lift them up unto the Lord"? Are you not afraid, are you not blushing from shame, since you prove to be a liar during this dreadful hour? Can you not see the Miracle of Miracles? The mystical Altar is ready, the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus, is being sacrificed for you, the priest is striving for you, the Cherubim are present and the Seraphim are flying around the Altar. While the Hexapteryga Angels cover their countenances and all the bodiless Powers along with the priest are interceding for you. Furthermore, the spiritual fire is descending and Christ's Holy Blood is being shed from His immaculate Side in the Holy Cup for your own catharsis! So, are you not afraid, do you not blush out of shame, for you present yourself a liar during this dreadful hour? With what boldness do you proceed to the holy Mysteries? With what corrupted conscience?[1]

Therefore, fear, awe, respect, reverence, vigilant attention should dominate inside the Church. Our eyes should focus on the Holy Table as well as our souls. We should sigh inside our hearts in an unvoiced way. For us to be able to lift up our hearts in heaven during the Holy Anaphora, means to prepare ourselves accordingly prior to the Divine Liturgy. Thus, we not only prepare ourselves by reading the Service of the Holy Communion, but by preparing ourselves for a lifetime. That is to say:

- the cleanness of the soul and body,
- the washing of tears and repentance
- the garment of gentleness, forbearance, consent, forgiveness, and patience,
- the most immaculate of our souls,
- the brightness of the nous…

Therefore, prior to the dreadful moments of the Sacrifice on Golgotha, as we are all waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit, along with the words "let us lift up our hearts" we must assure the Celebrant priest with our mind that our heart has indeed ascended and is next to God's Throne. This is why **Saint John Chrysostom** says as he proceeds with his previous sermon: "Before you see the veil of the Sanctuary, (of the Beautiful Gate that is), open and the chorus of Holy Angels proceed, make sure that you also ascend with them to the same Heaven.[2]

[1,2] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 18 a. 516-517

The introduction to the Holy Anaphora ends with the words **"We lift them up unto the Lord"** and its main part begins. Holy Anaphora as a whole is one unified Prayer. It begins with the words "Let us give thanks unto the Lord" and ends with the exclamation "And the mercies of our great God..." However, since it is interrupted to say certain exclamations, offer the incense and chant "It is meet and right..." this is why it is distinguished in four parts:

- **First:** In the Prayer of Thanksgiving or "Thanksgiving Prayer" and the Triumphal Hymn.
- **Second:** In the remembrance of the Mystical Supper.
- **Third:** In the epiclesis (invocation) of the Holy Spirit for the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts.
- And **fourth:** In the commemoration of the living and the departed.

It is an upward course which has the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts at its summit.

The priest declares: **"Let us give thanks unto the Lord"** and the people through the chanters answer: **"It is meet and right"**.

The chanters must not add absolutely anything to the words "It is meet and right", even if there is a con liturgy, even if the celebrant who is inside the Sanctuary takes his time to say the next exclamation. It is good for the chanters to be silent and hold their breath for a while! For silence during these moments in the Holy Anaphora is also prayer; the greatest prayer!

♦ "LET US GIVE THANKS UNTO THE LORD"

After the faithful Christians who are attending the liturgy have assured the Celebrant Priest that their hearts are indeed lifted up near God's Throne, the priest invites them to proceed to serve the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, after they have given thanks unto the Most Holy God. This is why he urges them: "Let us give thanks unto the Lord."

Holy Chrysostom writes that the dreadful Mystery, which is served on the Holy Altar Table and from which salvation is offered in abundance, is called **"Thanksgiving"**, for it constitutes a remembrance of God's ptenty of good deeds and reveals to us the zenith of Divine Providence. This divine Mystery urges us to thank God in every way.

This is exactly why the priest is also urging us, during the hour when this Sacrifice is being served, to thank God for the whole world and for all that was granted to us, for the past and the present, for what has happened and what will happen. This thanksgiving frees us from the earth and transposes us to heaven. It transforms us from men to angels.[1]

Therefore, we offer thanks to God for His benefits that are endless, but mainly for the greatest of His divine gifts, the Holy Eucharist. Even though it

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 10,158

does not add anything to God, we "are made more intimate to Him". With the Holy Eucharist, we become God's household!

♦ "IT IS MEET AND RIGHT"

After the priest's exhortation **"Let us give thanks unto the Lord"** the faithful answer: "This is meet and right".

Their answer, says **Saint Nicholas Cabasilas**, means that they give their consent so that the Holy Eucharist may be officiated: After all the faithful agree and cry aloud: "It is meet and right", the priest now all by himself offers God the Holy Eucharist".[1] There is an agreement between the priest and the Christians and then the priest returns to the Holy Altar to serve the Holy Eucharist.

According to **Saint John Chrysostom**, the response of the faithful "It is meet and right" reveals the unification with the Body of Christ and the equality among the celebrant and the faithful before the divine gifts. We are all equal before the divine gifts. "The thanksgiving offered to God is common, for the priest does not offer thanks by himself, but together with all the people. After the priest has commenced, everyone agrees that it is meet and justified. And then the priest begins the Holy Eucharist". And the whole people participate in it and go along with the Celebrant.[2]

Starting from the words **"It is meet and right"** that is being chanted and prior to the priest's exclamation **"Singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming and saying..."** the **"Prayer of the Eucharist"** or **"Eucharistic Prayer"** is being read by the Liturgist:

> **"It is meet and right to hymn Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks unto Thee and to worship Thee in every place of thy dominion; for Thou art God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever - existing and eternally the same, Thou and Thine only - begotten Son and thy Holy Spirit. Thou it was who didst bring us from non-existence into being and when we had fallen away didst raise us up again, and didst not cease to do all things until Thou hadst brought us up to heaven, and hadst endowed us with Thy kingdom which is to come. For all these things, we give thanks unto Thee, and to Thine only - begotten Son and to Thy Holy Sprit; for all things of which we know and of which we know not and for all the benefits bestowed upon us, both manifest and unseen. And we give thanks unto thee also for this ministry which Thou dost vouch-**

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy...*, ibid p.91

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 61,527

safe to receive at our hands, even though there stand beside thee thousands of Archangels and ten thousands of Angels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, hexapteryga, many - eyed, soaring aloft, borne on their wings".

As the Celebrant Priest is reading the Prayer very - very carefully, he and the people start going up towards Golgotha. The "Prayer of Thanksgiving" is the beginning of a three- blessed journey towards common Life...

"It is meet and right to hymn Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks unto Thee...". What does the Prayer tell us up to this point? Which intellect is capable of conceiving it? Which finite mind is able to comprehend God, Who created the universe with only one word? Which human or angelic tongue is able to describe His divine Majesty and Almightiness? None. Why is that?

The rest of the Prayer gives the answer. **"For Thou art God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing and eternally the same...".** This means that you are God:

- **"Ineffable":** One who cannot be described.
- **"Inconceivable":** One whom our minds cannot contain.
- **"Invisible":** You, our God, are Spirit, the ultimate Spirit.
- **"Incomprehensible":** You are the One who we cannot comprehend.
- **"Ever-existing and eternally the same":** You are the One that has always existed, the Eternal Triune God. "Which is, and which was, and which is to come".[1] Our Lord who is All- Sovereign, who is the Creator and Maker of the whole universe, visible and invisible, out of nothing, of men and of Angels.

God not only created man bringing him from inexistence to existence, but also raised him up again, when he had fallen away, with the incarnation of God - the Word and from earth He transposed him again to the Kingdom of Heaven. Man regained Paradise lost.

We especially give thanks unto Thee for the Divine Liturgy that we serve. The Divine Liturgy is the recapitulation of what God has been and is doing for us.

"We give thanks unto Thee, and to Thine only - begotten Son and to thy Holy Spirit; for all things of which we know and of which we know not and for all the benefits bestowed upon us...". The known benefits of God are numerous to all of us. We give thanks unto Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks unto Thee for the health we have been granted. We give thanks unto Thee for having been born by Orthodox parents and baptized at a young

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[1] Apoc. 1,4

age. We give thanks unto Thee for, although we are sinful, He is Merciful, He is tolerant, He is forgiving. We glorify Him for the great Mystery of Holy Confession, which is the bath of cleansing and rebirth. Gratitude, thankfulness, doxology… here is what God asks from us. Therefore, we give thanks to God for everything and for the Divine Liturgy, which He accepts by our own hands.

In addition, our thanksgiving to God shall bring forth new divine gifts to our lives. "Neither shall God ever cease to benefit and enrich man, nor shall man ever cease to be benefited and enriched by God. Man, who is grateful towards his Creator, is at the same time the vessel of His goodness and the instrument of His doxology",[1] **Saint Irenaius** tells us.

All of God's benefits, seen and unseen aim at one thing, man's salvation. This is why we owe Him gratitude, thanksgiving and doxology on a daily basis. Furthermore, the more we give thanks unto Him, the more and much more God increases His gifts. **Abba Isaac the Syrian** mentions it: "The thanksgiving of the one who receives, arouses the one who gives so that the latter may give greater gifts compared to what he had previously given".[2]

We give thanks to God's blessing which is being offered to us. However, as we give thanks, the blessing and Grace of God increases… And the blessed chain is lengthened. Here is how the Fathers present this chain:

- **God's blessing - Our own Thanksgiving - God's Grace**
- **God's Grace - Our own Thanksgiving - God's Benefit**
- **God's Benefit - Our own Thanksgiving - God's Providence**
- **God's Providence - Our own Thanksgiving - Paradise**
- **Paradise - Our own Thanksgiving - God's Glory…**

It is a never- ending chain to the ages of ages!

The three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, as well as Apostle Paul, inform us that during Great and Holy Thursday night, in the Mystical Supper, before imparting His Disciples and Apostles the Bread and Wine that is His Body and His Blood, our Lord lifted up His eyes high **and gave thanks** to His heavenly Father: "Jesus took bread… **and gave thanks**… and he took the cup…**and gave thanks**".[3]

The Evangelists do not make the Lord's thanksgiving known to us. The conclusions of the Fathers of the Church are approximately the following: During the Mystical Supper of that unforgettable Great and Holy Thursday in the upper room of Jerusalem, the Lord gave His Father thanks for He had appointed Him a Great Archpriest in the order of Melchizedek, and at the same time a blameless Victim. The spotless Victim, the Slaughtered Lamb, the Crucified or also Sacrificed, is being offered for the salvation of the

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[1] Saint Irenaeus Lougdounon, P.G. 7,829B

[2] Abba Isaac the Syrian, *The preserved Ascetics*,..., ibid, p.126

[3] Mat. 26,26-27

people as a whole, that is, for all the people of all centuries. This willing Sacrifice and offering was worth every thanksgiving. Human generation, which is fallen away, would be saved. Simultaneously, however, during those holy moments the Lord also recommended the great Mystery of the Holy Communion, which would be given to those who believed, in word and in action, and baptized, as Heavenly Bread and as "the hidden manna". Precisely this establishment of the great Mystery as food for life eternal was also worth every thanksgiving.

"...this do in remembrance of me".[1] Precisely what the Lord did in the Mystical Supper on Great and Holy Thursday night (always according to Apostolic Tradition) since then the Orthodox Church continues doing during the service of the Divine Liturgy. We give thanks, for He accepts this Divine Liturgy's offer from our earthly hands.

"...even though there stand beside Thee thousands of Archangels and ten thousands of Angels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, Hexapteryga, many-eyed, soaring aloft, borne on their wings...». God could have appointed the Eucharist to be served, to be officiated by the most pure angelic Powers in a worthy manner. What is more natural? Yet, He makes us humans worthy of doing it and condescends to the Sacrifice from our filthy hands!

As we enter more and more deeply into the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, we reach before the Throne of our Holy God, and at the same time we are on earth. We are both in heaven and on earth! Heaven and earth have now united have become one. The physical and spiritual worlds have found their one and only center: God's throne! The way we see it, the Holy Altar is what we consider center; still the heavenly Throne even though we do not see it is simultaneously the center.

We follow one journey in the Divine Liturgy: We enter the holy Church Temple. We receive Christ our Savior, when he comes out holding the holy Gospel. ("Wisdom. Let us attend.") We listen to His divine word. We watch and observe His miracles. Then with the Great Entrance, we escort Him to the dreadful Golgotha. He suffers, He is slaughtered and we are saved. He is crucified and we are raised with Him! Thus, little - by little we reach the centre of the universe. Triumphant and Militant Church give thanks to God. Angels and men co-glorify the Lord. Time has faded away... Laity and clergy have been transfigured. They are experiencing - those who can - liturgical transformation!

Indeed! We follow a certain journey in the Divine Liturgy. A journey with Christ! A journey of divine unity! A journey of mystical prayer! A journey of real prayer, of real unity!

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[1] Luk. 22,19

137. There were two Russian ascetics Father Arsenius who was both Gerondas and priest, and Father Nicholas, who was disciple and chanter in the Skete that was dedicated to the Honorable Forerunner. Monk Parthenios has preserved and described their tear-filling and splendid Divine Liturgies. These two ascetics were the type of monk who fasted, who did all -night vigils, who prayed incessantly and wept continuously.

Half a year before his dormition Father Nicholas went blind. Simultaneously, numerous other illnesses were torturing and tormenting him. He could no longer go to Church and was being tormented by dreadful pain as he mourned sitting or lying in his cell,. Thus, the Liturgies became less and less. They were served once a week. The ill and blind disciple, who did not know the meaning of the word inaction, was chanter and reader.

On Meatfare Saturday, they served the liturgy. After the Divine Liturgy Father Nicholas visited his Geronda's cell and as he was filled with tears he started telling him:

- My Holy Gerondas, when after the Liturgy I went to my cell and sat on the bed, my blind eyes all of a sudden opened and immediately saw everything around me.

Then the door of my cell opened and it was filled with light. Three men entered; two young men with candlesticks and one in the middle in a glowing garment, which radiated an ineffable light. They approached me. The one who was in the middle asked me:

- Do you recognize me?

- Of course, I recognize you. You are Anikitos, our friend and fellow traveler there in Jerusalem, who wanted to become a hermit and ascetic on Mount Sinai. In fact, I heard that you died three years ago.

Then he told me:

- Indeed, Father Nicholas! I am Anikitos! You see the glory and brightness with which the King of Heavens, our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Savior rewarded me for the little repentance and the minute askesis (spiritual exercise) I underwent. You will be rewarded the same way. However, "you shall see greater things than these"! In four days, you will be freed from all sorrow, trials and illnesses. The Lord sent me in order to comfort you.

They immediately left the cell and I was left alone. Then my eyes once again closed, but my heart was filled with inexpressible joy. After his Spiritual Father and Gerondas had heard all that, he told him:

- Father Nicholas you should be careful so that you may not be deceived. Do not believe in all these, but look only at God steadfastly and ask for His mercy, His Grace, the remission of your sins and the "good defence"before the dreadful Seat of the Lover of Mankind but also the Righteous Judge!

This is what he said so that his disciple's soul would be humble and watchful, for the fiery darts of the evil one do not cease to be hurled against us even prior to our death.

On Cheesefare Thursday monk Nicholas attended the last Divine Liturgy. He received Holy Communion and as he was taking the Antidoron (holy bread, eulogia) he told his Geronda:

- I beseech you, my Geronda, come to my cell.

The Gerondas went with him. Father Nicholas sat on his bed. His countenance started changing, glowing. As he lifted up his eyes to heaven, he came to some form of ecstasy. The place was filled with ineffable sweet smelling. Then he came round and started saying:

- I thank you, my holy father, for you showed patience with my weaknesses to the end of my life and with your guidance, you led me to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Spiritual Father asked him:

- Father Nicholas do you see anything?

- I do, Gerondas, I see that they have come for me and have torn the manuscript of my sins. Now my Gerondas, give me your blessing!

And he lowered his head. Then the Spiritual Father gave his blessing with his hand. He then took his Gerondas' hand, which he did not cease to kiss, and just before he let it go, he raised his eyes up to heaven and in a calm voice uttered:

- Lord, receive my spirit...

That same moment he gave up his soul to the Lord, Whom since his youth had worked for and served with faith, self - denial, obedience and love. He went through a path of ascetical struggles together with Christ, a path filled with divine revelations and divine unity, a path of mystical prayer and many tears he experienced in continual Divine Liturgies.[1]

With what great brightness and glory does the Church Triumphant constantly and incessantly celebrate her own heavenly Divine Worship! Would it not be wonderful for us also to be celebrating our own metamorphosis in the Holy Spirit inside the Churches on earth during the Divine Liturgy?

Faithful, striving Christians not only defeat the flesh, the world and the devil, they also defeat their nature. In addition, one who defeats one's nature (the old man of sin) "is above nature", so he experiences the supernatural and is unified with his Creator, Christ the Savior. This is mainly experienced in the Divine Worship.

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[1] Holy Monastery of Xeropotamou, magazine *Aghiorite Testimony*, issue 16-17, 1992, p.108-109

The"Thanksgiving Prayer" ceases its whispering and cries in a loud voice through the celebrant's mouth:

♦ "SINGING THE TRIUMPHAL HYMN, SHOUTING, PROCLAIMING AND SAYING..."

The Triumphal hymn, which we chant during the Holy Anaphora, hymns Christ Jesus' victory over death and the devil.

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth;
heaven and earth are full of Thy glory:
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest".

It is a joining together of the Triune angelic hymn, the one that Prophet Isaiah had heard the moment God invited him to the Prophetic office: **"Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full...".** As well as the hymn with which the people of Israel received the Lord, "who willingly came to the Passion", in the Holy City: **"Hosanna in the highest, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest"** (which is taken from the 117th Psalm and prophesies the Lord's triumphant Entrance to Jerusalem: "This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad therein. O Lord, save now; O Lord, send now prosperity. Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord".[1]

Saint John Chrysostom makes a comparison between the Triumphant Hymn of the Divine Liturgy and the Triumphant Ode that the Hebrews chanted when they were freed from Egyptian bondage: "Let us sing to the Lord, for he is very greatly glorified".[2] "For that is when the demons and not the Egyptians were the ones swallowed up. It was not that physical weapons were overcome but malice was abolished. We are not proceeding for the Promised Land, but we are moving to heaven. We are not eating manna, but are being fed with the Master's Body. We are not drinking the rock's water, but Blood from Christ's side."[3]

Elsewhere, the same Saint mentions: "The Angelic hosts above are glorifying; on earth the people in the Churches are chanting in a chorus offering the same doxology as them. The Seraphim above cry the Thrice Holy (Trisagion) hymn; on earth, crowds of people ascribe the same hymn. Common is the banquet that of the heavens and of earth that is being set up..."[4]

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[1] Psalm 117,24-26

[2] Ex. 15,1

[3] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 6,110

[4] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozanis, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid, p.326

In other words, in heaven, the hosts of Angels are glorifying. On earth, the Christians are chanting in a chorus imitating with them the same doxology. Above, the Seraphim are chanting the Thrice-Holy hymn, here in the Holy Church on earth the multitude of Christians that are attending the liturgy are ascribing the same hymn. The heavenly and the earthly are having a common celebration.

This common chanting chorus, according to **Saint Maximos the Confessor's** interpretation, "means a common way of living, conduct and symphony of the divine doxology which shall occur at the same time and place by heavenly and earthly creatures in the age to come". Not only is the Church's liturgical song being coordinated now with the Angels' heavenly doxology, but it also foretells the Angels' common conduct and way of living with the people who will be saved, in the Triumphant Church in the age to come...[1]

All these descriptions and images are not philosophical thoughts, but a vivid reality. A reality, which God's Saints lived and live, and in fact their descriptions are very - very poor in relation to what they are experiencing with the sense of their souls...

When we chant the Triumphal hymn in the Liturgy, we along with the angelic Powers stand beside, before God's Throne. Angels and humans together glorify the Lord.

This is the reason why the Celebrant priest does not merely invite us to this hymn as he stands before the Holy Altar Table offering the rational Worship and bloodless Sacrifice, but primarily refers to the Cherubim and commemorates the Seraphim. He then urges all of us Christians to raise our voice, distracting our attention from earthly things as we bring to our minds the Angels who are celebrating and glorifying. To chant and stand together with the Seraphim, opening along with them the wings of our souls and flying with them around the throne of the Heavenly King.

138. The book "Limonarion" mentions the following incidence:

On the Holy Summit of Mount Sinai in the past, they were accustomed to serving the Divine Liturgy on the day of Pentecost. A large number of monks would gather there from the surrounding Sketes and Hermitages.

Once, a fearful event occurred during the Holy Eucharist, prior to the Holy Summit's defilement by the hordes of the unfaithful and barbarians.

When the priest made the first exclamation of the Holy Anaphora:

"Singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming, and saying"... (in those days the exclamation was said as follows: "the triumphal hymn

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[1] Saint Maximos the Confessor, P.G.91,692C

of Thy excellent glory chanting, voicing, glorifying, shouting and saying with a glorious voice") a dreadful roar was heard from all the surrounding mountains together, that resembled an echo and sounded like a voice. Moreover, this roar that was filled with awe and fear answered back to the Celebrant Priest's exclamation: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of thy glory. Hosanna in the Highest. Blessed is He that commeth in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest".

This inconceivable sounding roar kept repeating the Hymn until the Divine Liturgy was completed!

Quite a few of the monks and ascetics who were present, but not all only those who had the proper ears to hear the Angels' heavenly hymns, could hear this strange roar which was beyond this world...[1]

The same event is repeated in an endless number of variations, every time the fearful Mystery of the Divine Liturgy is being served! Those who heard and saw with a sense of their souls this inconceivable incidence, either sanctified Celebrant Priests, or monks, or faithful Christians, were by all means totally pure from the sinful noise of the world and of malice.

Being gripped by the multitude of passions, we simply show our presence inside the Church, without being able to chant along with the angelic Powers. We could therefore say that for only a minimum amount of time we are able to participate through the Divine Worship in the universal doxology of Christ's victory.

Despite all our weaknesses, our attention, awe and reverence must be greater as much as that is possible during the Liturgy in relation to what we hear and what takes place. This is why we are analyzing, so that we become aware of what is going on, for we are ingnorant.

The Triumphal hymn of the angelic Powers around the most holy triune Throne had a double meaning for Prophet Isaiah: It was both a Doxology and a Prophecy.

Nevertheless, in the Divine Liturgy for us here on earth, the Triumphal hymn is both a Doxology and a Prophesy. It is a Doxology for the victory, which has already taken place. It is the victory against death, against the devil, victory against sin. Prophesy on the other hand, for the Second final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ the Victor.

The Triumphal hymn is the Annunciation for the all - glorious revelation of the Son of God's Second Coming, while the Holy Cross, the sign of His glory will precede! The Kingdom of God has come, is to come and "is within you".[2]

With Divine Worship, the Triumphal hymn and Holy Communion, the Kingdom of Heaven has not only come (with the incarnation of God the

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[1] Moschos Ioannis, *Limonarion*, Volos 1959, p.60

[2] Luk. 17,21

Word), not only is it coming (with His Second Coming), but is also within us, as food and drink of the Body and Blood of Christ. Everything within us and around us is made radiant, is glorified, is brightly clothed, is transfigured.

The Angels' Triumphal hymn is also our own hymn, of us all, the Celebrant's, the holy chanters', the Christians' in the Church and especially that of the children.

139. Father Joakeim Spetsieris has preserved many incidences from the life of great Elders on Mount Athos.

Among them he also refers to Father Ilarion, whom he saw serve the Mystery of the Divine Liturgy many times. He did not know how to describe the heavenly and ineffable conditions that he experienced in the Divine Worship. Moreover, how could angels not visit him, for he was the disciple of the well - known Elder Savvas the Spiritual Father? Father Savvas was of giant spiritual stature that was caught up to the heavens whenever he served the Divine Liturgy.

When Father Ilarion was serving alone or along with his Elder Father Savvas, during the exclamation "Singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming and saying ..." and while the chanters were chanting "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Sabaoth...", he would beat his chest and sob. Who knows what his spiritual eyes were able to see during that moment!

The Hagiorite fathers tell us that he must have seen the heavenly archangelic Powers serve the Liturgy in awe before the Slaughtered Lamb that was covered in blood... So indescribable were the heavenly homes of the Slaughtered Lamb's Worship and Glory above, that nothing else was left for him to do, besides the holy trembling he experienced, but beat his chest and be flooded with tears and weeping. Along with the angelic Powers Father Ilarion also was shaken by the paradisal liturgical life and transfiguration.[1]

(All this is ungraspable for our poor and secular minds, for we measure everything based on logic.)

Not only did Father Savvas the Spiritual Father and Father Ilarion use this framework in their liturgical life but also many other Hagiorite fathers. A life filled with tears, shocking experiences, angelic leaps, ecstasies and divine elevations. Furthermore, the Crucified Lord fed and daily feeds His worthy celebrants with His Most Holy Body and His Precious Blood. Thus, making every one of them, including us, who receive Holy Communion in a worthy manner, "a builder, and farmer, Paradise and tree of life, pearl and crown, passionate and dispassionate, man and god-like, wine and living water, sheep and groom, warrior and weapon..."[2]

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[1] Spetsieris Joakeim, Archmindrite, *Memoires*, New Skete, Mount Athos 1998, p.46

[2] Cherubim Arch., *Contemporary Hagiorite Personalities, 6. Savvas the Spiritual Father*, ibid, p.96

With the exclamation: **"Singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming and saying..."**, the priest "lifts up", the Star from the holy Paten (tapping it slowly crosswise after every word, or once for the oneness of the one Divinity or twice for Jesus Christ's dual nature) for practical reasons, for the Sanctification of the Precious Gifts will then follow.

The people chant the triumph of Heaven and the Celebrant Priest begins his steep ascent to the most heavenly Holy of Holies!!! How will his eyes see? How will his hands of clay touch and cut the most holy Body into pieces? For the priest is also human..., sinful... Nevertheless, he enters "in a cloud and on a high mountain". While he is there "face to face" alone with God, he takes over the superhuman task to serve the dreadful and bloodless Sacrifice.

Every step, every move, every lowering of the head and knees... all the movements of the hands, eyebrows, lips, tongue, and heart of us priests, are observed by the myriads of Angels, who are surrounding the Holy Altar Table on earth.

The gaze of the humble Celebrant turns towards the Lord Who is on the Cross, beseeching His mercy. He trembles as he recalls His divine commandments. "And also let the priests who come near the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out upon them".[1] If he has not been cleensed and purified he is in danger of being totally exterminated by God.

"As we are looking at the Bread of the Holy Eucharist, we must picture Christ the Savior on His Glorious throne, on the right hand of God the Father. If we do not picture Him IN THIS WAY, it means that we are not looking at the most holy Bread in total faith, but "SHAMELESSLY". The sight of the Lamb of God "Who takest away the sin of the world", is the reverend priests' greatest reward and enjoyment. In the Prayer of the Holy Unction as the Priest is glorifying the Lord, he says "Who has invited me the humble and sinful and unworthy... to the greatest rank of priesthood... and (made us worthy) of seeing with my own eyes the countenance of the Holy Anaphora and rejoice in Thy Divine and Holy Liturgy..."Oh, Lord, make us wise."[2]

The holy all - bright cloud, which covers the worthy celebrants, little by little spreads to the whole congregation. The great moment is near, the heavenly Powers are chanting with great humility and reverence.

- They are chanting as they cover their faces with their (arch) angelic wings.
- They are chanting with great humility and contrition
- They are chanting "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth..."
- They are chanting with most uncorrupt lips and undefiled tongue, that is to say with tongue and lips that are foreign to the filthiness of sin.

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[1] Ex. 19,22

[2] Meletios Metropolitan of Nikopolis, *translation Staretz Sampson, life and teachings.* Preveza 1995 [3], p.83-84

- They are chanting with a heart that is totally devoted to God.
- They are chanting with a fiery mind, which cannot take any secular, gross thoughts of ours.

We also chant with the most pure Noes (Minds) from these Churches of ours, here. The whole united Triumphant Church, is chanting the Triumphal hymn triumphantly. This is also, why we should chant the Triumphal hymn in a solemn and reverent way. It is no time for showing off, but for the fear of God!

During these holiest moments of the Triumphal hymn, we are either moving back and forth or being impatient. In addition, with the ignorance we are gripped by, we either do not pay any attention to what is happening during the Holy Worship or -something that is even more tragic - our minds and thoughts are traveling here and there to cares of this life as well as to every secular thing....We have not realized that an endless number of hosts of angelic Powers is swamping the Church. The Triumphant Church along with all the Saints are present, among us!

While the reverent chanters and people are chanting the Triumphal hymn, the priest reads the "Prayer of the Holy Anaphora":

"With these blessed powers we also, O Master who lovest mankind, cry aloud and say: Holy art Thou and all-holy, Thou and Thine only - begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit; Holy art Thou and all - holy and magnificent is Thy glory, who hast so loved Thy world as to give Thine only - begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, Who, when He had come and had fulfilled all the dispensation for us, in the night in which He was betrayed or, rather, gave himself up for the life of the world, took bread in His holy and immaculate and blameless hands; and when He had given thanks and blessed it and hallowed it and broken it, he gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying".

The central part in the Mystery of Holy Dispensation for the salvation of man and of the whole world is the Love of God. God gave His Only - Begotten Son and Word to the world dead from sin, so that life may return; and He did this only out of love! "Not because He was not able to redeem us in other ways, but because He wanted to show us His love for us! A kind of love that cannot be compared with anything else! He drew us near Him with the Death on the Cross of "the Son of man",[1] who at the same time was also both Son and Word of God, our incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the God - Man. And even if God the Father had something else more precious than His Only - Begotten Son, He would offer it to us, so that the human race would be saved".[2] Thus, Christ's Sacrifice is the manifestation and revelation of Divine Love towards man.

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[1] Mat. 8,20

[2] Abba Isaac the Syrian, *The Preserved Ascetics*..., ibid., p.153-154

During the Holy Eucharist we are experiencing in action, the mystery of Christ's redeeming Sacrifice on the Cross, but bloodlessly. During the Divine Liturgy the Lord is present. He is ascending Golgotha, He is being nailed on the Cross, He is being sacrificed, He is dieing for our salvation. On the Holy Altar "lies" the Slaughtered Lamb, the most immaculate Lamb, "who takes away the sin of the world".[1] Respect the Holy Altar Table, for on it there is the Victim - Christ, the Slaughtered Lord..."[2]

This why in that first Mystical Supper, the Lord offers His Most Holy Body cut up in pieces and He Himself calls His Precious Blood "poured out". Therefore, the sacrifice that is served is not a mere image, but a true, real, living, fearful and holy sacrifice. For our Lord Christ Jesus God - Man Himself is on the Holy Altar Table slaughtered. Christ is the One Who is being sacrificed and offered to all faithful Christians. He is the One "that Offereth and is Offered".

While the Holy Anaphora proceeds to the zenith of the dreadful Sacrifice, the **incense** is slowly being prepared. Shortly we shall cense the Body of the Master "that is lying on the Holy Altar Table" and with the fragrance of the incense, which will spread throughout the Church Temple, the inconceivable presence of the Holy Spirit will be proliferated - so to speak. We shall proclaim that: the Sacrifice on the Cross-on Golgotha and the Sacrifice in the Divine Liturgy is ONE and only ONE! For the Lamb is one: Christ! The Divine Liturgy or Holy Eucharist or Divine Worship is the Mystery of Jesus Christ's Death on the Cross NOW.

Thus, the hour of the awesome Sacrifice is near. Even though we are touched or even weep, when we hear nice consoling sermons from our Spiritual father, our Elder, even though we are captured by contrition by the graceful narration of an incident from the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, of a miracle, of a martyrdom, I wonder, what must our heart do before the martyrdom on Golgotha!? What spiritual transformation must it undergo before Christ's holy Passions? And how can the Celebrant Priest's soul and souls of the faithful endure before such unbearable humility and sorrow and grief of the "Son of Man" and God Man's Sacrifice on the Cross? Whoever of us priests and of you faithful in the Church experiences Golgotha's grief that brings salvation, shall certainly taste the unutterable light that is the light-like glory of the Resurrection!

The whole mystery of our Orthodox faith - a mystery of infinite humility and sacrifice, a mystery of infinite glory and divine gladness - is surrounded by the Drama of the Divine Liturgy. Moreover, if the Celebrant Priest experiences these states in the Holy Anaphora, then his whole being is shaking from the most powerful spiritual leaps of the Holy Spirit.

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[1] Jn. 1,29

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 58,737

140. Eighty years ago, on Mount Athos, in the Skete of Small Saint Anna, Father Ignatius the Spiritual Father used to serve presiding - among the many celebrant priests - of a festive Divine Liturgy.

I wonder what his celebrant priests would see. What great sight would their eyes see? Which bright angel would appear before them? Father Ignatius' countenance would be transformed, radiant, glorified by divine Grace and as shiny as the face of an Angel. The awesome moment of the Holy Anaphora would approach...

Indeed, all priests and monks experienced beside Father Ignatius' glistening appearance who was serving the liturgy, their own liturgical metamorphosis in that deserted chapel. Before them was a living Temple of the holy triune Light![1]

Another time, this is what happened:

141. After a certain lay brother had finished the Salutations following the Small Compline he turned towards Father Ignatius in order to get his blessing... But what was it he saw? He was shocked and started trembling before the strange lightning. He was shaking from the chills of transfiguration. Father Ignatius' face had been gleaming from the Glory of Mount Tabor! His face like the face of a heavenly Angel was glowing and immersed in light. The light was so intense!

Who knows, however, how many times more the face of the holy Spiritual father would glow from a glory out of this world every time he served the Holy Eucharist?

Indeed, who is able to see and describe exactly the holy and awesome events of Divine Worship? Which eye is able to cross through "the cloud of the secret - mystical silence of the Holy Gifts", according to Saint Dionysius the Areopaghite, and see the light bearing, inconceivable Mysteries? Which eye can?[2]

Every word, movement, and blessing of the Celebrant Priest declares extraordinary events. Events that are true, real, and awesome. We see Golgotha, the Crucifixion, unbearable pain, wounds that cause shuddering, ingratitude that causes continual grief, infinite sorrow from the burden of sins of all people that is without limit, of all ages. We see... the whole Drama of the Lord on the Cross.

Here, death is destroyed, the devil is overpowered, sin is taken away, resurrection is granted, Paradise is opened, the ancient beauty returns and adoption is received. We commune the immaculate Mysteries and immedi-

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[1, 2] Cherubim Arch., *Contemporary Hagiorite Personalities, 7 Ignatius the Spiritual*, Oropos Attica 1973, p.94-96

ately we experience with certainty the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, divine Blessedness and the joy of the Angels. That is to say, we taste the fruits of the awesome Sacrifice, in which we participated a while back.

"A few drops of Blood recreate and transfigure the whole world. To us who commune, they are like a juice of eternal milk, which unites us, gathers us, and binds us in unity... We are brethren, children of the same Father! Members of one another".[1] May this unity of Love become a reality, and be instilled in our neighbor, our companion, our family. Thus, may we always glorify God, may we pray incessantly, show forbearance to everyone, be patient without complaint, be joyful in Christ Jesus. All these are the genuine fruit of the Sacrifice on the Cross-which we receive in Holy Worship through Holy Communion.

In the holy Altar we see the root from which the tree of Life was brought forth, that is the Triune God's love for man. May we, who are present in the Divine Liturgy and are partakers in Holy Communion, inherit and instill this love.

> **"Who, when he had come and had fulfilled all the dispensation for us, in the night in which he was betrayed or, rather, gave himself up for the life of the world, took bread in His holy and immaculate and blameless hands; and when he had given thanks and blessed it and hallowed it and broken it, he gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying;**
> (Aloud:) **Take, eat. This is my Body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins".**
> The people: **"Amen".**

This excerpt of the Holy Anaphora refers to the institution of the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist during the Mystical Supper.

We shall begin from more simple analyses and gradually proceed to more difficult and more spiritual ones, for so many experiences exist, as there are men who commune; so many experiences as the number of times they consciously participate in the Holy Worship.

Our Lord in His three-year but also divine and saving mission on earth performed many - many miracles: He turned the water into wine. He walked on the sea. He calmed the great tempest. He filled thousands who were hungry with five loaves of bread and two fish. He opened the eyes of the blind. The mute spoke. The deaf heard. The paralytics walked. Those who were bent over were raised up. The demon - possessed were freed. The lepers were cleansed. He raised the dead and in fact Lazarus, who was already dead for four days. He was Transfigured before His Disciples and shone like the sun. Christ performed so many miracles and taught so many things by evangeli-

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[1] Saint Gregory the Theologian, GCF 5,178

zing the people "if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written".[1]

However, the zenith of our Lord's incarnation, activity and teaching on earth was realized "for our salvation" His Sacrifice on the Cross-that took place on Golgotha. **Saint Nicholas Cabasilas** tells us that: "On the one hand, the holy Passions that the Lord endured, "made for our salvation", on the other hand, the miracles are mere proof of our salvation".[2] More simply, no matter how many miracles Christ performed, if he were not to sacrifice Himself on the Cross and shed His Most Holy Blood, no one would be saved. This is why the Divine Liturgy is also among other things a remembrance of the Sacrifice, which Christ offered: "this do in remembrance of me".[3]

The night of Great and Holy Thursday there is a reference of this part of the Prayer of the Holy Anaphora, which commences with the Mystical Supper and continues by reminding us of the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, meaning the Lord's painful and bloodied prayer to His Heavenly Father. It reminds us of the sleep of His three beloved Disciples, the crowd that came "with swords and clubs" to arrest Him, Judas' kiss of betrayal, the arrest, the abandoning by His Disciples and whatever else happened in the courts of Annas and Caiaphas and in Pilate's Praetorium (the spitting, buffetings, beatings, the curses, the laughter, the scarlet robe, the reed). All these shocking events of the awesome Passions and the Sacrifice on the Crossare brought to life through the service of the Divine Liturgy. These events do not cease to take place.

Yet, we come back to the Mystical Supper for which all the Evangelists, including the Apostle Paul, wrote. When the last days of His life were approaching, our Lord Jesus Christ wished to eat the last Passover with His Disciples. The house in which the Mystical Supper took place according to Tradition, belonged to Mark the Evangelist.

Why though is it called "Mystical Supper"?

The word **"mystical"** derives from **"mystis"** (one initiated) which in turn derives from **"myo"** (to initiate). Therefore, the Supper did not take place secretly and in seclusion, but so that the Lord would reveal, present and teach His twelve Disciples that the Mystery of His Sacrifice on the Crosshas already taken place. That Thursday's Supper is called, and is "MYSTICAL", for the Lord initiated His Disciples and through them, us to the Sacrifice that brings salvation: He Himself ministered Golgotha's Sacrifice on the Cross.

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[1] Jn. 21,25

[2] Gregory Hieromartyr, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.277

[3] Luk. 22,19

With His Mystical Supper Christ, in a way that is inconceivable to the human mind and common reason, anticipates the events that pertain to the Betrayal, the Judgment, the Passions, Golgotha and the Sacrifice on the Cross. He anticipates them for they are present in the nourishment of His Most Holy Body and His Most Precious Blood..."Eat my Body", he tells them, "and drink my Blood." I am the "Slaughtered Lamb". The Lord expresses himself in this way because the Sacrifice has ended;[1] and it continues taking place with our own Divine Liturgy!

The Mystical Supper took place one day before the start of the Hebrew Passover. During that year, since Passover was on Friday, the 13th of the month of Nissan, the Hebrews transferred it to Saturday the 14th. This is what they did and have been doing since then. Thus, the Lord used leavened bread. This is evident in the following verses:

- "...and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover".[2] In other words, they did not enter the Praetorium so that the idolaters' home may not defile them, but instead be clean so that they may be able to eat the passover dinner at night.
- John says the following about the Saturday, during which the Passover would begin,: "for that sabbath day was a high day".[3] That is to say that it was not like any other Saturday, but the Saturday of the Hebrew Passover, the eve of which the use of unleavened commenced. Thus, during the Mystical Supper they used leavened bread, with yeast and salt. Therefore, the papists mistakenly insist on using unleavened bread. It was not the eve of Passover, but a day before.

During the Mystical Supper Christ also pointed out Judas the Traitor: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me".[4] "Who is he?" Everyone asks. The Lord answers: "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it".[5] Moreover, He gave it to Judas Iscariot.

According to Luke, the Evangelist during the Supper His Disciples started "a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest". And the Lord teaches humility: "he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve".[6] Christ also prophesizes Peter's triple denial: "...the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me".[7] Later on, according to the same Evangelist Christ foretells His Disciples the future persecutions that they will endure because of Him. Finally, John the Evangelist has preserved what is called "the Gospel of the Covenant". It starts with the Mysti-

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[1] Saint Gregory Nyssis, *Sermon on the tree- day deadline of the Lord's Resurrection*, LGFCA 69,238: **«...Therefore He who gave His disciples his own body as nourishment, reveals Himself in the form of a lamb so that the sacrifice is made perfect».**

[2] Jn. 18,28 [3] Jn. 19,31 [4, 5] Jn. 13,21and 26 [6, 7] Luk. 22,26 and 34

cal Supper, continues in the Garden of Gethsemane and concludes with Jesus' wonderful High Priestly Prayer towards God the Father.

Thus, the Holy Eucharist is Great and Holy Thursday's Mystical Supper, **WHICH CONTINUES**. It is not a typical repetition of what the Lord said and did in other words, a plain repetition of the Supper, but the revelation of the mysteriological expansion of the event. The One who is expanded "Christ to the ages". It is the Mystical Supper itself for Christ Himself is the One who offers and who is being offered. "The one who offers and the Offered".

This means that whatever the Church does, the life of the Church itself is a reception and a Handing down (Tradition) of Divine sermons and divine events, a continuation without end. One thing is certain: Great and Holy Thursday's Mystical Supper in the upper room of the Evangelist Mark's house and the Mystical Supper in the Holy Altar are the same.

♦ THE MYSTICAL SUPPER AND THE INSTITUTION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

142. Many years ago, I had heard about the reverent monk Aberkios in the New Skete on Mount Athos. He was extremely ascetic, merciful, hard - working, simple, meek. He used to attend Church services such as all-night vigils and the Sunday liturgy in the Kyriakon [the main Church of the Skete]. In fact, he used to stand with extreme reverence in the back of the Church, the Narthex.

Once, during the all-night vigil of a great feast, the Great Doxology had been completed and the First Hour was read not chanted. It is then when the fathers all of a sudden see the Elder Aberkios leaving his pew in order to walk across the whole Church in a quick manner to reach the Sanctuary and after entering from the Beautiful Gate, which was open, he stood before the Holy Altar. Later, they see him making a prostration before Someone, whom they could not see, and in a joyful tone of voice, he answers:

- Yes, Master, I can see. Monk Aberkios. Thank You, thank You!

After, he made a deep prostration, and as if he were kissing someone's hand, he once again exited from the Beautiful Gate and returned to his place.

Those who observed Father Aberkios' behavior thought that he went to the serving priest to tell him something. However, the priest

who was in the "Sanctuary" then and saw the scene, which we have just described, considered him frivolous and because he was hypothetically a fool for Christ, he did all this.

The following day the priest went to search for him in his poor little cabin and asked him:

- What happened yesterday? How did you dare enter the Sanctuary from the Beautiful Gate? Moreover, with whom were you talking?

Astonished, as he was, Father Aberkios answered in all simplicity:

- Father, couldn't... you see the Master, Who was standing for such a long time in the Beautiful Gate calling me to go near Him? He asked what my name was and I told Him. Later on, He wrote it on a stone, which is in the Holy Altar, on the right... and He actually showed it to me to read..."Monk Aberkios"!

Everyone found out what had occurred, and all the fathers kept asking him repeatedly how it happened and what the Master told him. The Elder Aberkios was narrating the whole story in a detailed way. However, this simple and harmless old monk was wondering why the brotherhood kept asking him, for they must have all seen - this is what he believed - his vision of God(theoria)! He finally believed that it was the working of divine power, for there was no marble stone in the Holy Altar and so, they never found it.

What could it have been? It was the heavenly book of Eternal life, where the Lord and Master Who is also the Lover of Man records "the clean of heart", those who have been saved, the Christians who are striving, who perish in repentance, the Martyrs, the Confessors, the Righteous, the Holy, the Saints men and women![1]

What a wonderful mystery! What a magnificent honor! What divine majesty!... if the Master Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, were to come out to the Beautiful Gate during the Divine Liturgy to call us with our first name and if we were to approach Him, not in order for Him to write our names on some marble stone, but in order for Him to take us up in His Divine arms and lift us with Him in the heavenly dwellings of His Triumphant Church?! Besides, this happens every time we serve the Divine Liturgy; Christ offers Himself right from the holy Cup, addressing us with our name: "The servant of God (so and so) partakes of the precious and all-holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting"!

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[1] Joseph Monk, *Patristic figures of the New Skete*, Thessalonica 1988, p.30-31

The priest says **"TAKE, EAT. THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS BROKEN FOR YOU, FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS".**

The people respond: **"Amen".**

The priest (inaudibly): **"And likewise after supper, he took the cup, saying"**. Aloud: **"DRINK OF THIS, ALL OF YOU. THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT, WHICH IS SHED FOR YOU AND FOR MANY, FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS".**

The people: **"Amen".**

At this point of the Holy Anaphora, we are at the instituting of the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist of Holy Communion. The following paradox is happening: We priests are not the ones who serve the Mystery of Divine Worship Christ is! We serve it or rather we minister it, but Christ is the one who offers! "He offers it and He is offered". Christ is present now and then and always. The Bread and Wine is Christ Himself, Whose Flesh we eat and Precious Blood we drink.

The **Holy Nicholas Cabasilas** says: The Bread is no longer bread... it is the Master's Body, the true Body of God - Man Jesus Christ, who received reproaches, curses, laughter, bruises, buffetings and the spitting. This is That, which was crucified and slaughtered. It is That, which testified the good confession during Pontius Pilate. That which was scourged and tortured with a whip of cords, that which suffered spitting, that which tasted gall and sour wine. Nevertheless, the Wine is no longer wine. It is the Master Christ's true Blood, which gushed forth and flowed from His slaughtered Body. It is the Most Holy Blood, which flowed from His pierced side. This Body, this Blood, is the One that was institutionalized by the Holy Spirit that was given birth by the All Holy (Panagia) Theotokos. It is That which was buried, it is That which was resurrected on the third day "according to the Scriptures", it is that which ascended to the Heavens and that sat on the right hand of the Father and God."[1]

This Master Christ, Whom the Elder Aberkios venerated before the Holy Altar Table..., is the Same both on the Holy Altar Table and inside the Holy Cup.

Jesus Christ of the Holy Communion is the Body, which the Lord God assumed from the Manger to the Cross, the Burial, the Resurrection and the Ascension. It is the One that sitteth and is glorified in Heaven on the right hand of God the Father. It is the Lord offered for our salvation "unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting".

If we could open the gates of heaven of the Triumphant Church, the Kingdom of God, we would be able to see the King of all and Sovereign Christ,

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.92

making the universe radiant with His divine Glory. It is He Who is on the Holy Diskos and inside the Holy Cup. It is He Whom we wretched and unworthy priests not only see but also handle with our hands.

143. Some days ago, a priest told me the following most awesome event:

A certain Celebrant, after the words: "Let us attend. The Holy Things are for the holy" commenced breaking the Lamb of God, but hasty and carelessly. As he was breaking It nervously, a big Pearl of the Most Holy Body was thrown down! He bent and started looking for It in order to find It. Finally, he saw It and reached his hand to get It. Nevertheless, horrified as he was, he sees Jesus Christ's Head!

It spoke to him! Indeed, It spoke to him in a voice which he will never forget!!! What did it tell him?

- IT IS FAR BETTER DOWN HERE, THAN IN YOUR HANDS!

That moment the Lord Himself judged and condemned him. This is why he stood still... and froze from fear. It took him many months to recover...[1]

It is awesome, awesome for all the Celebrants of the Most High and for me the sinner...

After the communion from the Cup during the Mystical Supper, the Lord said "this do in remembrance of me".[2] This commandment is found in the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, together with the rest of the words, as the Apostle Paul submits them: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death".[3] That is: every time you eat this Bread and drink this Cup, you shall proclaim My Death and testify My Resurrection.

"...He gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying: Take, eat...Drink of this all of you".

The Lord's words are called **"founding words"**, for through them the Mystery of our salvation was institutionalized, handed over and founded.

When the Lord referred to His Body, He said "broken"; and when He referred to His Blood, he said, "poured out". These two words are in the present. His Body is being broken now; His Blood is being poured out now. Thus, not only once but FOREVER! Every time the Divine Liturgy is served, it is served "now"! It has been served FOREVER, for two thousand years now! Now! Today!

Jesus Christ names His Blood "of the new covenant", that is to say of the new agreement between God and men. The animals' sacrifice and blood con-

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[1] Personal notes [2] Luk. 22,19 [3] I Cor 11,26

firmed the old agreement; the new agreement was confirmed again with sacrifice and again with blood, but with Jesus Christ's Sacrifice and Precious Blood, "as a spotless and undefiled lamb". The lamb of Pascha in the Old Testament is the pre-figuration of Jesus Christ in the Sacrifice on the Cross. The Lord is the true Lamb: "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world".[1] The Cross-was not the one that carried Christ but Jesus Christ was the one that carried the sins of the world on the Cross. Jesus Christ Who offered Himself a Sacrifice on the Cross-for the sins of the world.

"Take, eat... Drink of this all of you..."

The people respond: **"Amen".**

When the people say "amen", inaudibly and with humility, through the holy chanters, it has an assuring meaning. It is a firm and absolute testimony of faith: "Indeed, this is how it is! This is what "amen" means: It is Your Body... it is Your Blood..."

When the priest stands before the Holy Altar Table, repeats the Lord's "founding words", and calls upon the Holy Spirit, this is exactly when the Miracle of Miracles takes place. The Bread is converted into Christ's Body and the Wine into Christ's Blood!

Papists say that the priest's words "Take, eat..." and "Drink of this Cup..." are sufficient in order for this Miracle to happen. Nevertheless, our Orthodox Church, according to the teaching of its Fathers, considers on the one hand these words, as the primary cause of the Miracle, on the other however in order for this Miracle to happen in every Divine Liturgy it is imperative to call upon the Holy Spirit, as it is done during other Mysteries. Calling upon the descent of the Holy Spirit goes back to the first Christian centuries!

The priest prays that it may descend not as the fire that came to Prophet Elijah's sanctuary, but that the Holy Spirit may come in order for the Sacrifice to be realized, not only on the Holy Altar Table but also in the hearts of men. So that it may consume their passions, burn all sinful thoughts and through Divine Grace illuminate the mind.

144. A virtuous girl was in the devout habit, with her Spiritual Father's permission and exhortation, of receiving Holy Communion of the Immaculate Mysteries regularly.

One Saturday the Celebrant Priest refused to commune her saying that "it is not right for women to commune so frequently. You shall come for Holy Communion on the Fourth Sunday of Lent".

The reverent girl was greatly hurt for this loss and the priest's tactless insult. After the end of the Divine Liturgy, she stayed inside the Church, kneeled - after everyone had left - and began to pray with great

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[1] Jn. 1,29

compunction and with all her heart. Simultaneously, she shed silent tears for missing her chance to receive the divine Gift and Grace.

As she was praying, she suddenly sees before her a most majestic and brighter than the sun Archpriest, Who was being escorted by a multitude of brightly clothed Priests and Deacons, while at the same time Angels and Archangels were chanting with ineffable sweetness. Then Christ the Archpriest in a most sweet and gentle voice, asks the girl who was taken aback why she was weeping so much. With great humility, she told Him the story about the loss of Holy Communion. Then the Great Archpriest enters the Holy Bema and takes from the Holy Gift's box a piece of Sanctified Bread, which had been securely preserved since Great and Holy Thursday. He invited her near Him and He Himself communicated her with His Divine hand, saying, "Take My Flesh, My Body and My Blood, for eternal life's betrothal". Immediately, the Great Archpriest and our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven "along with all the visible Powers". This blessed girl remained inside the Church, filled with inexpressible joy and gladness.

Shortly after, when the priest had returned, she revealed the inconceivable event of having partaken Holy Communion, that is, the Body taken from the Holy Gifts' box, by Christ Himself. Moreover, since the sanctified pieces were numbered, the priest not only believed but also had his lesson.[1]

We have now come to the wise Solomon's **Proverbs**,
(Chapter 9, verses 1-6) and interpret:

Verse 1: "Wisdom has built a house for herself, and set up seven pillars". Wisdom has built a house for herself, which she founded on seven pillars.

The word **"oikos"** (house in English), according to the Fathers of the Church, is Christ's Church and the **"seven pillars"**, her seven Mysteries, as well as the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, as they are presented by Prophet Isaiah (11, 2-3):

- "The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
- the spirit of counsel and strength,
- the spirit of knowledge and godliness,
- And the spirit of the fear of God".

Verse 2: "she has killed her beasts; she has mingled her wine in a bowl, and prepared her table." That is, she has prepared her own slaughtered animals; she has poured her wine into a crater (a large open bowl used for mixing wine and water) and set up her table.

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[1] Agapios Monk, *The sinners' salvation*, Athens 1950, p.272

Verse 3: "she has sent forth her servants, calling with a loud proclamation to the feast, saying". Then she sets out her maids (that is to say, the preachers of truth) to invite in a loud voice, those who wish to drink wine, saying.

Verse 4: "Whoso is foolish, let him turn aside to me: and to them that want understanding she says." Here the word **"foolish"** does not mean one who is crazy, cruel, unethical, but one who lacks the illumination of divine wisdom. Thus, this verse is interpreted as follows: May the one who lacks wisdom come near me; and to those who lack divine wisdom she adds.

Verse 5: "Come, EAT of my bread, and DRINK wine, which I have mingled for you". That is to say, come, eat from my bread and drink from my wine, with which I have treated you. In this verse, one is impressed by the use of the two verbs, eat and drink, which are similar to those used in the narration of the Mystical Supper and Divine Worship.

Verse 6: "Leave folly, that ye may reign for ever; and seek wisdom, and improve understanding by knowledge". That is, so, leave your foolishness aside, so that you may reign to the ages. Ask for wisdom and try to complete your understanding by achieving divine knowledge.

By interpreting the Proverbs (chapter 9, 1-6), **Saint Cyril of Alexandria** observes that what is referred to by the wise Solomon are symbols and prefigurations of all those things performed in the Divine Liturgy. They are those, which constitute the enjoyment of the spiritual feast of Divine Worship, which was prepared for us by God the Gift - Giver. The divine and inconceivable gifts are before us. The mystical Table has been adorned. The life - giving Cup is full. The King of Glory is inviting to the Supper, the Son of God is receiving the guests... The enhypostatic Wisdom of God the Father, who herself built a Church Temple without hands for Herself, shares Her Body in the form of bread and offers Her Life - Giving Blood in the form of wine.

What an awesome mystery! What an inexpressible dispensation! What an inconceivable Divine forbearance! What unreachable tenderheartedness! The Maker gives Himself to the creature, so that he may enjoy Him! "Life Himself" ("I am the resurrection, and the life"[1]) offers Herself to the mortal as food and drink. Come and eat my Bread (which is my Body) and drink my Wine (which is my Blood) that I have prepared for you on this Holy Altar Table..."Taste and see that the Lord is gracious".[2]

During the Mystical Supper of Great and Holy Thursday,
Christ hands over two things:

- **First:** His Body and Blood as immortal nourishment and life ever lasting.

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[1] Jn. 11,25

[2] Saint Cyril of Alexandria, P.G. 77,1017CD

◆ And **second,** the new commandment of love:"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you".[1]

Therefore, when we are partakers of the Holy Eucharist, we not only commune the Lord Master's Body and Blood, but also His Divine love...

Prior to the exclamation "Thine own of thine own..." and after the holy chanters have said "Amen", bowing low, before the Holy Altar Table the priest inaudibly says: **"Having in remembrance, therefore this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Grave, the third-day Resurrection, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming...".**

"Having offered His Disciples His Holy Body and His Precious Blood in the Mystical Supper, Christ gave them the commandment: "This do in remembrance of me". In this way, He teaches us that "remembrance of Him" is not a mere thought, but rather an action: ministering the Mystery of His Supper. The only way of "remembering" the unapproachable to our minds mystery of His Dispensation, is by re-living His Sacrifice in the Divine Liturgy."[2] A plainly symbolic ceremony would be appropriate in remembrance of someone; however, only His living Sacrifice during the Mystery can be considered a "remembrance" of Christ!

"This do in remembrance of me..."

The heretics tell us and keep repeating that it is a mere remembrance, thus distorting the Lord's words. These phrases follow the institution of the Divine Mystery. That is, first He gives us His commandment: "Take, eat. This is my Body... Drink of this, all of you. This is my Blood...", and then the Lord tells us "this do in remembrance of me". Therefore, by necessity the Apostles initially and then their successors applied the commandment "Take, eat...Drink..." so, they ministered the Mystery of His liturgical remembrance! What does this mean? That in the liturgical remembrance Christ is Present, Live, Real, True. Moreover, with the bloodless Sacrifice we eat the Master's Body and drink His Most Holy Blood. Thus, together with **Saint Basil** the Great we can testify, what is referred to in one of his liturgical prayers: "The Mystery of Your Dispensation has ended".

"This do in remembrance of me".

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God the Word, gives this commandment to us. He is the One, for whom the Holy Scripture assures: "All things were made through him; and without him was not any thing made that was made".[3] He who "spoke, and they came into being",[4] He who with the com-

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[1] Jn 13,3

[2] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.281

[3] Jn. 1,3

[4] Psalm. 32,9

mand of His word created everything, He Himself who once again commands and orders that which lasts until the end of time, a new inconceivable creation: The bread and wine becoming His own Body and Blood!...

"This do...". Do what I did a while ago, not only once, but also continuously, forever! For I have told you "he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood (continuously, forever), dwelleth in me, and I in him".[1]

"This do...". It is as if the Lord says: Gather around me all the time. Even though you will not be seeing me with your bodily eyes, I shall be Present. I shall always and continuously be Present with my Body and my Blood. For "he that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood has everlasting life". And the Lord continues: "You shall be seeing bread and wine... you shall be seeing the Celebrant Priest. Nevertheless, he is only an instrument of mine for I borrow his hands, his voice. The priest is there, so that My invisible Presence and My inconceivable Power may be more perceptible by the senses! In addition, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, "whom I will send unto you from the Father"[2] shall make the Holy Conversion. Thus, it shall make the bread my Body and the wine My Blood."

145. It was this exceedingly great Miracle of Miracles of the Holy Anaphora that Father Aberkios would see at New Skete in a paradoxical way...

Father Aberkios would stay awake praying with his prayer rope. Many times, as dawn was approaching, he saw a bright radiant cloud descending from the sky. Furthermore, in whichever little cells the fathers would serve the liturgy and the Holy Anaphora approached this bright cloud would spread. It would spread without partiality to all small and simple little Church Temples and would sit -in a way- on top of them.

Then Father Aberkios would immerse even more in fervent prayer![3]

We should pay special attention to the two parts of the Holy Anaphora:

- **The first part** is the Sanctification and Deliverance of the Cup that occurred after dinner. The Evangelists and the Apostle Paul mention the phrases "As they were eating" and "after supper", something that we also say prior to the exclamation "drink of this all of you..."
- **In the second part**, we must pay attention to the fact that the priest sanctifies the Bread on the Holy Diskos separately from the Wine, which is inside the Holy Cup, not both of them together. The reason why this is done is evident in the separate phrases that the Lord uses: As far as the Holy Bread is concerned He says: "which is given for you", as far as the Holy Cup is concerned He stresses: "which is shed for you";[4] (Matthew writes "which is shed for many"[5]).

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[1] Jn. 6,56 [2] Jn 15,26 [4] Luk. 22,19 [5] Mat. 26,28

[3] Joseph Monk, *Patristic figures*..., ibid, p.31

Thus, by delivering the Holy Bread to His Disciples the Holy Eucharist is being emphasized as a **MYSTERY**, through which the heavenly Bread that is His Most Holy Body, shall be transferred constantly (up to His Second Coming), "broken" and "distributed" to all those who shall be receiving Holy Communion, when the Divine Worship is being served. However, by delivering the Holy Cup, the Holy Eucharist is also being emphasized as **SACRIFICE!** More analytically now: The Lord's Blood on the Cross flows out of His Most Immaculate Body, waters the Cross, splashes, dashes, in other words, **"it is shed"**.

It was not only shed for the Apostles but for the whole world. This is why it is stressed: "which is shed for you and for many" - for all! Drink ye all of it..."[1] Yet, not all of us drink of it, for we are free to choose to drink His Precious Blood "for the remission of sins".[2]

And precisely because not all people are going to believe in the God - Man Jesus Christ's world saving Sacrifice through which they shall ask for their redemption, this is why Christ does not say "which is shed for all", but "which is shed for many". That is, only for those - the few or many - who shall believe throughout the ages.

The papists do not give the Blood of Christ to everyone, thus they innovate and have authority over this matter in a heretical way. This is what they also do with the Precious Bread. In the Orthodox Church the Bread, which symbolizes the unity of the Christian body, is ONE despite some minute local differences in her members. All, clergy and laity receive the Holy Eucharist from the Same Bread. However, by voiding the unleavened host the papists, void unity, thus distorting the institution of the divine Mystery, since the host is not being "broken", is not being cut; therefore their laity does not partake of this Divine Bread.

♦ "THINE OWN OF THINE OWN WE OFFER UNTO THEE IN BEHALF OF ALL AND FOR ALL".

146. Once, according to the book entitled "Limonarion", two children ten and twelve years old, had memorized all that which is said and done in the Divine Liturgy due to their longing to become priests.

Therefore, one day they decided to play priests and serve the Divine Liturgy, since they knew it by heart one way or another. They took a loaf of bread and wine and went to the outskirts of their village. They found two large flat stones. They used the first one for the Sanctuary and the second for the Holy Altar Table. They made their stoles out of paper and used sacks for cloaks. Then they began the Divine Liturgy as normal.

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[1] Mat. 26,27 [2] Mat. 26,28

They reached the point where they had to repeat the institution words of the Holy Eucharist:"Take, eat...Drink of this all of you..." While they were saying the phrases "which is shed for you and for many", although the sky was clear blue, an awesome lightning fell causing great thunder and burnt everything, turning the two stones, the things on them as well as the surrounding area into black ashes.

The children remained unharmed! The paper stoles and two sacks were singed and burnt on the top part and not on the bottom in order to prove the authenticity of the miracle! On the other hand, the children could neither move nor speak out of fear. After a whole day had gone by, the children did not show up. Their parents were worried and started searching for them in order to find them. They finally found them in the state mentioned earlier.

The children gradually came round and told what happened in every detail. The parents then made this incident known to the village's priest who in turn notified the province's bishop.

The bishop along with the children, the village's devout parish priest of the village, the parents and many other villagers came to the place where this strange miracle had occurred.

The bishop saw the place in a state of wonder and since he was a holy clergyman, he knew deep inside that indeed this is how God's wonders happened. There, in that same location, he initially built a magnificent Church placing the Holy Altar Table at the point where the miracle with the two-burnt stones had taken place. Later, a big monastery was erected where the two children became monks and worthy Celebrants of the Most High.[1]

The Divine Liturgy is the most awesome Mystery. Nothing greater, holier, more life - giving and more awesome than the Holy Eucharist exists on earth. The Divine Liturgy is a truly heavenly service on earth, during which God Himself in a particular, inconceivable and direct way is Present, as an invisible Celebrant that offereth and is offered "for the life of the world and its salvation".

Despite all the inconceivable things that happen in the Divine Liturgy, clergy and laity we are all careless (and in a more lenient expression :) unprepared! It is known that before Moses ascended the top of Mount Sinai, he was ordered by God to prepare himself appropriately and be cleansed through fasting and prayer.

During the Divine Worship, we find ourselves before a fearful event, which is incomparably more fearsome than that which occurred before Moses. He took off his sandals in order to receive God's Presence inside the Divine

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[1] Moschos, Ioannis, *Limonarion*, Mount Athos 1983, p.226

Cloud. In the Divine Liturgy we are before the Word incarnate eating of His Master Body and drinking of His Most Holy Blood and yet we do not take off our passions, we do not throw aside the "sandals" and the old garments of our sins! "Unfortunately, we cleave to sinful, earthly things! We do not wish to devote ourselves solely and exclusively to God, not even for an hour! In this Divine, heavenly Liturgy we at times allow ourselves to think and day-dream about earthly things, sinful images and fantasies.

Still, we must pray fervently, with a warm heart, constantly think of This great Mystery, repent for our sins, thirst and pray for our purification, holiness, illumination, renewal, our reinforcement in the Christian life and in the fulfillment of Christ's commandments. We must pray for the living and the dead, for the Liturgy is a Sacrifice of propitiation, thanksgiving, praise and prayer."[1] The Divine Worship is love. Therefore, whoever accepts this love in the Divine Liturgy, melts, is not able to, cannot endure it! One says, "It's enough"! (Who among us is filled with love?)

Indeed, the Liturgy is great! A remembrance is being held of the life not of a famous person, but of God incarnate, Who suffered and died for our sake, then was resurrected on the third day, ascended into heaven and who shall come back to judge the whole world!

The Liturgy is the Supper, the Table of God's love towards the human race. On the Holy Diskos, which surrounds the Lamb of God, everyone is gathered: the living and the dead, the Saints and the sinful people, the Triumphant and the Militant Church: The ONE Church with the ONE Shepherd, Christ!

"Having in remembrance, therefore, this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us..."

We said that when Christ in the Mystical Supper offered His body - "Take, eat..." - and His Precious Blood - "Drink of this all of you" -, he also added a commandment, which we have also analyzed: "This do in remembrance of me".[1] Not merely in order to remember Me, but for you yourselves to serve the Mystery of My Mystical Supper." The only way for every Christian to remember Christ and His Mystical Supper, as well as the whole Mystery of His incarnate Divine Dispensation, is by re-living His Sacrifice on the Crossin the Divine Liturgy. We do not simply recall the events of Great and Holy Thursday and Friday (Passion, Crucifixion, Death, Burial), but **WE LIVE it** in the present, in Divine Worship.

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[1] Saint John of Kronstand, *My life in Christ*, Athens 1996[6], p.165

[2] Luk. 22,19

We are present on Golgotha; we are beside the Cross-, and under the Cross. Moreover, we must attend the Lord's Passion! We must ascend with Him the awesome Golgotha! It should not seem strange to us, we must stand side by side His Most Immaculate Mother, His beloved Disciple John and the Myrrh - Bearing women. During the course of our Savior Jesus Christ's holy Sacrifice, which commences during the Great Entrance, we should also be with Him. We should hurt, we should suffer a little. Only in this way shall we be able the occurrences of the Sacrifice on Golgotha to live in the present. Only then will we be able to enjoy the fruits of this Sacrifice, that is, the fruits of His crucified Love, which is His Most Holy Body and His Most Precious Blood, which is the remission of sins, redemption, salvation, and life everlasting.

We experience everything past and future as present. This is where Divine Worship leads us! Thus, it is not enough simply to attend Church services, but we ought to **LIVE** the whole Mystery of Divine Presence. In the Mystical Supper of Divine Worship "we look for the resurrection of the dead", we live the joy of Heaven, that is to say the joyful expectation of Christ's Second glorious Coming. It is the joy-giving expectation that Christ once more will be coming "to judge the living and the dead". It is our joy! Currently we are eating His Body and drinking His Blood; the day after tomorrow to the ages of ages, we will be enjoying Him eternally with ineffable joy!

The content of the words: **"and all those things which have come to pass for us"** do not only include the remembrance of the Divine and saving commandment of the Mystical Supper "Take, eat..." Drink...", the Sacrifice on the Cross, Death, the Unnailing, the Burial, the Descent into Hades, the crushing of death through the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven and the Session at the Right hand, but also Christ's glorious Second Coming and the divine Blessing of the Kingdom of Heaven, which the Christian pre-enjoys and pre-tastes through Holy Communion!

In the Grace of the Divine Liturgy, the future events (that is the Second Coming and the joy of Paradise) are and are said to be "all those things which have come to pass", for Christ "he that offereth and is offered" is outside and beyond time and space." Everything, past and future is experienced in the present!

The words of the Prayer, at this point seem to have remained unanswered and thus the Celebrant Priest cries aloud **"Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee in behalf of all and for all".**

On the other hand, the people through the holy chanters inaudibly and calmly chant: **"We hymn Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord. And we pray unto Thee, O our God".**

In every place and time and for all the good things, we offer Thee these

Gifts, which are Thine own, from what we are given by Thee. We offer God the Gifts, which He has offered us through creation, with the seal of our gratitude. The Gifts for the Divine Liturgy, prosphoron and nama (round loaf of specially prepared liturgical bread and wine) is not an offering of only man's gratitude towards God but of the whole creation. Thus, creation, which is the making of our Triune God and which is represented by the Precious Gifts, is being returned or rather is once more being offered to God by us. Nevertheless, God also gives them back to us, not only as Holy Communion, but also as a gift and Divine Grace for our spiritual life, that is to say, as nourishment for immortality "for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting".

As the priest takes the Christians' Gifts in his hands, he blesses them. He need not make the sign of the blessing, for they are blessed as soon as they are held. They cease to be of common use and are separate symbols of Holy Worship.

"With all that was mentioned it seems that the Divine Liturgy is the restoration of man and creation, which also fell along with man and due to man. (This is why we say that with the fall of Adam and Eve the whole creation revolted; the animals became wild and the earth was filled with thistles and thorns.) Prior to Adam and Eve's fall, the life of the world, which God created, and in fact, of man who sums up all of creation, was a truly continuous Liturgy. Everything was being referred and offered to God as Liturgy and Worship and Holy Communion (that is, a gracious communication with God), so as to once again be given and offered by God to man, as Divine Grace, for man's true and immortal life."[1]

"Thine own of thine own..."

Until now, our gifts were Precious Gifts, offered and dedicated to Divine Worship. They were the symbols of our Lord's Sacrifice and Death on the Cross, and even of the Holy Burial. However, with the exclamation "thine own of thine own..." they are being offered for the Sacrifice on Golgotha. In a minute, they will become the Body and Blood of Christ. This mysterious, inconceivable and supernatural Conversion (and not "Transubstantiation") will occur with the invocation of the Holy Spirit. We will no longer have bread and wine or mere symbols before us and on the Holy Table, but the same Most Immaculate Body and Precious Blood of the Master and God - Man Lord Jesus Christ, Who was sacrificed willingly for our salvation.

The papists accept transubstantiation and do not invoke on the Holy Spirit. We, nevertheless, in Holy Worship repeat in a true and orthodox way, that which the Lord did and said on Great and Holy Thursday night. This act of remembrance - "this do in remembrance of me" - is vivid and real. How-

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid, p.339

ever, we call on the Holy Spirit to seal this act, through His Grace and power, in order to make the MIRACLE a reality. The Holy Spirit is that which performs the Church's Sacrifice on the Cross! "Changing them by thy Holy Spirit".

When the priest communes the Christians, he must say to every single communicant: "The servant of God, N., partakes of the precious and all-holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting". Yet, these words are the summary of the Lord's institution words during the Mystical Supper, when Christ invited His Disciples to be communicants of His Mystery. **"This is my Body, which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins"** and then **"this is my Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins"**. The Lord stresses this during the Mystical Supper; we priests also stress it, when the faithful partake of the immaculate Mysteries.

147. Around 1950 a monk, who as the Hagiorite fathers recall stuttered a lot, had died on Mount Athos. He could not speak well and he had a fearful look, when he was about to proceed to Holy Communion. I wonder why.

When he was a young child about 12 years old, he loved so much going to the Church and attending the Divine Liturgy that he decided to serve it by himself. His uncle was a priest so he had secretly taken from him and the town Church whatever is needed in order to serve the Divine Liturgy. That is, the holy Cup, the holy Diskos, the Gospel book, the Prosphoron, the Wine, and all the rest. He had even found some old vestments, which he also took with him. Then, one day when he was home alone, he got ready, vested, read the prayers for the Proskomedia and then served the "Divine Liturgy".

According to the liturgical rite, the time to "commune" had come. As soon as he put the bread in his mouth, it turned into bloodstained meat... He was overcome by terror... and terror was turned into panic and shock, when he saw the holy Cup boiling in Blood... and he fainted!

When his family returned home and frightened they saw their son fainted as well as the sacred vessels on a small table, along with all that he had performed...

They called their relative, the priest, they brought the child round and later the priest tried to speak with the child so that he could get some explanation. Stuttering and with a great deal of difficulty he managed to say what had happened...

The area's hierarch was invited along with other priests to carry the offerings to the town Church's Holy Altar, where the child's uncle was serving as a priest. The following day they served the liturgy and consecrated this broken Bread and Wine, the way it is done when we prepare for the Pre-Sanctified Divine Liturgy.

The child could never come round... In his twenties, he became a monk on Mount Athos. However, he would commune always in fear and supported by other monks. He would get agitated only by thinking that his mouth could once again be filled with pieces of Flesh...[1]

We do not know the reason why God allowed this to happen... "Let us stand aright!" This phrase is not said during the Divine Liturgy in vain.

"Thine own of thine own we offer unto thee in behalf of all and for all".

With this exclamation, the Celebrant Priest holds the Precious Gifts in cross-wise fashion (his right hand over the left), elevates them slightly and makes the sign of the Cross; at the same time, he says "Thine own of thine own..."

"In the past a certain commentator who was interpreting the exclamation and the words of the Holy Anaphora's Prayer that are said inaudibly prior to this exclamation, said the following: "Having constantly in mind this saving commandment and all that has been done for us, for our salvation, that is the Cross, the Passion, the Burial, keeping all of these in mind, we offer You, Lord, "all Thine own that belong to Thee". **"In behalf of all"** that is to say, in relation to those which are commanded by You and according to the Apostolic Injunctions, **"and for all"**, that is for all that you have done for us."[2] This interpretation is simpler and more comprehensible.

Many Fathers, however, relate the words **"Thine own of thine own"** to one of Malachi's Messianic Prophesies that is, with the undefiled and clean Sacrifice of the Holy Altar Table, which the Holy Spirit consummates, confirms and seals.[3] At precisely that moment when the priest invokes the Most Holy Spirit, to convert the Precious Gifts that are being offered into the Body and Blood of Christ, he associates and unites the earthly Altar with the most heavenly One, the Triumphant with the Militant Church.

Thus, the many and numerable Altars of all the Holy Orthodox Churches, throughout the world, are gathered into the the same heavenly Altar; and their many offered Sacrifices of the Same Lamb, "which taketh away the sins of the world" become ONE and only, clean and undefiled! Therefore, this is why, we praise, bless and give thanks to God the Father, as the people chant it, when we offer our bloodless Sacrifice.

All this divine banquet of heaven and earth also becomes our own conquest and nourishment, divine taste and life! Through the Celebrant priest and along with the priest, all of the faithful, striving Christians in the Church reach the heavenly Altar. In Divine Worship all of us so long as we are parta-

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Paraskevopoulos Yervasios, Archmindrite, *Interpretive Overview....* ibid, p.211, footnote 2

[3] Mal. 1,11

kers of Holy Communion, receive the Grace of the Most Holy Spirit and thus become the Body of Christ! We become Christ bearers, god bearers, spirit bearers. Nevertheless, the ones who are not communicants still receive Grace.

These inconceivable, awesome and strange Mysteries become known through certain events. If we are living them, fine. Because, however, we are not experiencing them; we refer to certain stories to see how real the things that take place in the Divine Worship are.

148. In the 1960s during my frequent visits on Mount Athos, I had heard about a certain unseen but most reverent monk the following:

During one of his all-night vigils as he was sitting with his prayer rope outside his cell, either surveying the sea and the starry sky or immersed in the heaven of his heart, he at one point saw the "Kyriakon" (that is, the Skete's central Temple) lit...

- How about that... he said to himself, it seems that the fathers are having an all-night vigil but for which Saint? Let me look...

Thus, he set off and went towards the Kyriakon. The doors were open. The Church was well lit and the chanting was filled with compunction. When he attempted to enter, he saw that the Church was full of monks. All of them bent; their hoods covering their faces and they seemed much moved. The atmosphere was sweet, fragrant, compunctionate and at the same time light bearing...

The wonderful experience he was living was coming from Him who was serving the liturgy... He had a good look at Him. He was a majestic Hierarch, surrounded by twelve Priests. All of them were radiating. However, the Archpriest - Master was as bright as the sun! His brightness illuminated the whole Church, inside and out!

Overwhelmed by awe and captivated by the Master's glistening majesty, he did not realize how it ended...

- With fear of God and faith and love, draw near.

Then the Archpriest says:

- Come, my child!

He went! He went to commune! What an ineffable fragrance it was, indeed! What divine joy had overcome him! What paradises had filled his being? Where was he, in heaven or on earth? Was he himself or beyond himself? Was he in body or outside it? Was he awake or was he dreaming?

Suddenly he heard a voice that was in a state of wonder and fear asking him... (With the question, he came round...) The Dikaios of the Skete, who was also responsible for opening and closing the Church, was the one who touched and asked him.

- How did you manage to enter, father? Why are you here at this hour?

- Forgive me, father, answered the monk. It seems that I fell asleep after the Divine Liturgy... Forgive me..., bless!

- But for which Liturgy are you talking about, blessed one?

- Well, for the one that ended a while ago, along with the all-night vigil...

The Dikaios did not respond. However, he told the Gerondas of the Skete what had happened, that the door of the Church was locked, and that he opened it by turning the big key twice...The monk, whose countenance was glowing, was forced to narrate to the other monks what had occurred. Following this incident, and having realized that it was a supercelestial and supernatural experience, the monk vanished... He disappeared so that people even if these people were monks would not glorify him...

Of course, all of you have understood that this anonymous monk who revered God found himself in the Triumphant Church, in the most heavenly Altar, in the Divine Worship of the Kingdom of our Holy God... The inconceivable Divine Liturgy from above was being performed on earth, in a strange way, in a way that our poor secular minds cannot conceive... In fact, Christ the Master, the Lord of heaven and earth, the All - Sovereign, was performing it...

Moreover, something which is worth wondering: What did this unseen monk commune?

We shall never find out...[1]

This supernatural, vivid and real event, definitely agrees with what **Saint Gregory Palamas** tells us: "By using the Precious Gifts as the everlasting Light, the Celebrant Priest in spirit ascends the path that leads to the Father of Light. He ascends in a real and genuine way..., listens to the inexpressible words, and sees the unseeable sights and the Master Christ... Furthermore, his whole being is filled with admiration, divine ecstasy... competing with the tireless chanters - Angels and Archangels - having him become another angel of God on earth and before the Holy Altar Table. Thus, the celebrant, with the whole universe together, in the exclamation "thine own of thine own" also leads himself and certainly all the faithful Christians in the Church to the Triune God!"[2]

The moment, which is the holiest in the Divine Liturgy, is at hand. The priest kneels before the Holy Altar Table. However, the people who are also attending the Divine Liturgy, if they wish kneel and pray inaudibly, while the choir is chanting the words:

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Saint Gregory Palamas, GCF vol. 2, p.643

♦ "WE HYMN THEE, WE BLESS THEE, WE GIVE THANKS UNTO THEE, O LORD. AND WE PRAY UNTO THEE, O OUR GOD".

When this holy moment was approaching, certain provinces in the Russian Church prior to 1917 had a custom of ringing the bells joyfully, to announce to the whole world that the greatest Miracle of all is being celebrated.

During this moment one must kneel first in soul and repentance and then in body. (On Mount Athos they do not bend on their knees, but they bend from head to ground, they fold themselves in two.) No matter how a body stands, if it lacks repentance and compunction it is shallow and void. At times our hearts beat in a mystical way, our thoughts cease and a heavenly fragrance fulfills our senses. We are experiencing these most sacred moments of the life-originating Most Holy Spirit's coming.

When the priest elevates the Precious Gifts saying the words **"Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all"**, a very crucial message is being conveyed: that the Lord is near...before us! The priest's exclamation is a crack, a door, which is being opened to the people for them to see, to enter and participate in the celebration of the Mystery.

"We hymn Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord. And we pray unto Thee, O our God". This most sacred hymn of the people in the most central point of the Divine Liturgy is a hymn to the Holy Trinity. "We hymn thee, God the Father. We bless thee, Son the Word. We give thanks unto thee, Holy Spirit". God the Father is the One to which the Holy Anaphora is dedicated; the Son and Word is the One, who is being sacrificed "for the life of the world and its salvation"; the Holy Spirit is the One, Who ministers the sacrifice of the Church. Everything **INCLUDING** the Divine Liturgy is the working of "the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit".[1]

[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid, p.340

♦ THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE HOLY GIFTS

149. Once, as Chatzi - Yiorghis the Athonite, a great ascetic of the previous century, was saying, a certain hermit asked the devil:

- Which are the most dreadful things in your filthy dark life?

The devil answered:

- They are dreadful and unbearable to us.

- Which are they? The Gerondas asked once again.

- The first and foremost dreadful thing is Baptism, with which we have totally lost any domination and right over you. Then there is this wood, whose mark (he means the Holy Cross-and the sign of the Cross, of course) torments us, pushes us away and makes us disappear... The most dreadful of all however, is that which you eat, your Communion... It is more dreadful than hell fire... more dreadful than hell, where we live... He, the devil continued, who is clean and worthy of partaking Holy Communion, not only can we not approach but also we even fear to look at. And he immediately added: Even though to us these things are persecution and death, we are nevertheless grateful towards people especially to those Christians who are careless, whose own passions, willfully push away from themselves God's power, energy and the Divine Grace of the Mysteries. Thus, the Christians themselves give us the right to captivate their hearts so that they may never repent...[1]

With this incident narrated by the great ascetic Chatzi - George the Elder, the faithful were more able to comprehend in a more vivid way how precious the Mystery of Holy Communion is, particularly when they partake of it in a clean and immaculate heart!

The god-bearing Fathers of our Church, these "myrhhbearing flowers of the field in Paradise" tell us that every time there is a Divine Liturgy, the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts is performed and realized in the Light, in divine Light... Not the light of day or of the sun, but a particular beam of heavenly Light, which covers the Precious Gifts, the Holy Altar Table and the Celebrant priest. This Light is intangible, amorphous, shapeless, brilliant, peace giving and exceedingly bright!

150. There are some personal testimonies coming from worthy Celebrants and other faithful whose souls are whiter than snow, like the testimony of the ever memorable Abess Magdalene from the Holy Monastery of Chrysoleondissa on the island of Aegina, who used to be the sub-deacon of Saint Nektarios.

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[1] Gerondas Paisios Aghiorite, *Gerondas Chatzi - Yiorghis*, ibid, p.28

In one of our visits, she told us that during the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts she had seen with her own eyes everything being filled with a supernatural Light including Saint Nektarios' body, as well as the Precious Gifts, together with the Holy Altar. Everything being drenched and then disappearing in this strange amazing, peaceful, ecstatic blinding Light:

-It was the Uncreated Light..., she said, and the Abess' face, as she was speaking in the dark, started lighting up, becoming extremely bright...[1]

As our Triune God is eternal, timeless, intangible, is a Spirit, is everlasting, in like manner, this sweetest Light is forever, beyond logic, intangible, eternal. While sunlight is created, this one is uncreated!

Through the ages and up to now, during the awesome moments of the Sanctification of the Precious Gifts many most worthy Celebrants of the Most High who are as white as snow are filled with divine Light and Grace, in their senses or in ecstasy. They enter this Light in an inconceivable supernatural way and This enters in them. Their complete psychosomatic being is captivated by an infinite and inexpressible sweetness and peace, by awe and admiration!

The priest who is praying is broadened to eternity, to the supercelestial Altar, to the dwellings of the Saints, to the uncreated triune joy of Paradise by this strange outpouring of divine Blessedness. **Saint Makarios the Egyptian's** experiential testimony also assures us of this: "This mystery... is light only to those that have already been cleansed".[2]

We lack the experiences that are beyond logic. The soil we walk on is sufficient for us. Nevertheless, these experiences exist as events and the stories that we are referring to testify them.

After the exclamation "Thine own of thine own", the people chant the words "We hymn thee..." Then the celebrant bows his head reverently and continues by whispering the pinnacle of the Holy Anaphora:

"Again we offer unto Thee this rational and bloodless worship and beseech Thee and pray Thee and supplicate Thee: Send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here spread forth. And make this bread the precious Body of Thy Christ; Amen. And that which is in this cup, the pre-

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Saint Makarios the Egyptian, P.G. 34,742D

cious Blood of Thy Christ; Amen. Changing them by thy Holy Spirit; Amen. Amen. Amen".

It is an awesome incomprehensible moment in which the people participate in extreme silence by inaudibly praying "Lord, have mercy".

At this point, the Holy Anaphora has something extremely important to tell us: that the celebrant beseeches God - the Father, that the Holy Spirit come to us first - **"send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us"** - and then **"and upon these Gifts here spread forth"**, meaning the Precious Gifts. The reason behind it constitutes a very serious matter. Both the centuries and the history of the Church have the answer.

If the Holy Spirit does not descend, how are we priests, and you, the people, to be made worthy so that we may offer this dreadful Sacrifice to the Most Holy and Most Blameless God? Indeed! The Grace and Power of the Holy Spirit must come down, enter the depths of our souls, and therein realize the divine conversion, as the one that will shortly take place in the Holy Gifts here spread forth first to us and then to the Precious Gifts!

The Holy Gifts are bread and wine. The bread comes from wheat, which in turn grows on soil. It is soil! Wine comes from grapes, and they in turn come from the vineyard. The vineyard grows on soil and it is soil too! We also come from this same earth's soil. Yet, we are worse than soil. We exceed it. For many times our world within is filthy, sleazy with dishonor, passions and sins. Meanwhile sin - as we know - deprives us from Divine Grace. Therefore, we have perished both spiritually and morally. What do we ask for then?

The Bread and Wine shall be changed in a while through the descent of the Holy Spirit into a fountain of immortal and eternal life, that is, into the Immortal and Life-Giving Body and Blood of Christ Jesus. In like manner, we Celebrant Priests and Christians in Church, together with the working and Grace of the Holy Spirit, ALL OF US, ask to be cleansed, sanctified, transformed, ask to be "changed" to undergo divine transformation!

We beseech for this to happen, since unfortunately, while the Divine Conversion is taking place, we clergy and laity remain STRANGERS to the exceedingly great Miracle of this bloodless Sacrifice. Yet, the Mystery is being performed and takes place, even if the Celebrant Priest is unworthy of the Priesthood. Moreover, it is consummated and realized irrespective of the moral quality of the Christians present. The Mystery is realized irrespective of who we are!

151. Many years ago, certain monks on Mount Athos wished to accuse a certain Gerondas of having abandoned the spirit of a zealot, of supposed spiritual irregularities, ecumenism and the like.

So, during the same year one of the Zealots attended the usual all-night vigil at the end of which he intended to insult, rebuke and speak

evil of the Gerondas, who was now an Abbott and Celebrant that night, in the presence of all the monks. Therefore, the Zealot in question took his place on a pew and attended the vigil.

The moment of partaking Holy Communion had finally arrived. The Gerondas came out of the Holy Altar holding the Holy Cup in his hands. He said "With fear of God and faith and love, draw near", and the monks one by one, in an orderly manner, in a row and with fear of God drew near the Holy Cup.

Then all of a sudden, the Zealot monk stared wide-eyed...covering his eyes with his hands...and upset, as he was he exited the Church... Another non - Celebrant priest saw this strange scene and so he immediately went after him. When he caught up with the monk in the courtyard, he asked:

- Father, what is the matter? Why are you running away? Are you not feeling well, perhaps?

The monk answered, upset:

- I tell you! Your Gerondas is holy... While he was communing the fathers with the Holy Mysteries, I saw flames and rays of a strange Light springing up, which the monks swallowed... Your Gerondas was wrapped around by these rays and his whole being was immersed in the Light... Now, will the Zealots believe me when I tell them?

I also went to Mount Athos that year. In one of my meetings with the underling priest - who has already reposed- he narrated everything exactly as I described them to you.[1]

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas who tells us the following confirms this incident in a different way: "Christ, the one and only Light, glows as He descends through Holy Communiōn from heaven to earth... Everything is filled with divine Light! Yes, it is a fact, this Holy Bread, the Body of the Lord that is, which we partake from this Holy Altar Table bringing It within us as we are heading towards the Divine Kingdom, this same Most Holy Body of our Christ shall be seen in the clouds during His Second glorious Coming. Everyone shall see this which shall reveal His beauty east and west, like the speed of lightning, in a split of a second. Those blessed faithful who are worthy of partaking the Body and Blood of Christ live in this ray of divine Light. Nevertheless, when they pass away, the Light does not depart from them. For the Light incessantly follows the righteous. They in fact reach eternity immersed in this unwaning Light, with which they coexisted throughout their life on earth."[2]

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G.150,624 B

Saint Justin the Martyr sees the Conversion of the Precious Gifts as the coming and overshadowing of the Holy Spirit during the Annunciation of the Holy Theotokos, where the Working and Power of the Holy Spirit realized the incarnation of God the Word. Thus, in Worship also the Working and Power of the Holy Spirit converts the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

"Every Divine Liturgy is a new Annunciation since the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church stands in the Most Immaculate Theotokos' place. While the Body of the Church - through the mouth of the Celebrant priest - says: **"send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us"**, he repeats in a way the Ever- Virgin's word: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word"[1] and the Annunciation of the Gog-Bearing Church is officiated.[2]

With the Mystery of Holy Eucharist, our Holy Church becomes a God-Bearing Mother. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, descends upon Her and upon Her Precious Gifts. The Word of God is conceived in a mysteriological way; He Who is Timeless is born and offered as he is sacrificed upon the Holy Altar Table "for the life of the world and its salvation".

Saint John of Damascus links the Holy Conversion to the creation of the world, for the creation of the whole universe was made through the Energy and Power of the Holy Spirit.[3]

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas says that following the Holy Conversion's most sacred words "all the holy service has been ministered and carried out, the Gifts have been sanctified and the Sacrifice has been done and Jesus Christ, the Great Victim, Who was crucified and slaughtered so that the world may be saved, is seen laying upon the sacred and Holy Table".[4] These words that are taken from the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great mean that following the invocation, everything was done and completed.

In his Catechisms, **Saint Cyril of Jerusalem** says, "whatever is touched by the Holy Spirit is sanctified and converted".[5]

Most of the Fathers of our Church identify this Descent of the Holy Spirit with **Pentecost**. Therefore, the moment during which the Holy Spirit Descends and overshadows the Precious Gifts is identified with the Pentecost of Holy Worship. "At this point, the Divine Liturgy signifies the time of Pentecost", according to the **Sacred Chrysostom**.[6]

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1 Luk. 1,38

2 Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.288

3 Saint John of Damascus, *A precise publication*..., ibid, p.367

4 Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,440

5 Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, P.G. 33,948D

6 Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.289-290

While **Saint Symeon the New Theologian** even refers to a visible Descent of the Holy Spirit.

152. The God-bearing Symeon wishing to hide himself supposedly referred to someone else as he narrated the following story:

"I heard a certain monk priest who revealed to me that: I had never served the liturgy without seeing the Holy Spirit, I saw it coming to me during my ordination in the priesthood by the archpriest, and also while he was saying the Prayer with the Prayer Book resting on my wretched head.

I asked him how it was when he had seen It during his ordination. He told me: It was simple and shapeless, (without form) yet in the form of Light. While I was in a state of wonder, It (the Holy Spirit) was telling me in a mystical way:

- "In this way, I come to all the Prophets and Apostles and Saints and to God's chosen people, wherever they may be found nowadays, and especially in Holy Worship, as well as during all the Mysteries of the Church. For, I am God's Holy Spirit."

To Him be glory and dominion forever. Amen.[1]

The priest prays inaudibly: **"Again we offer unto Thee this rational and bloodless worship and beseech Thee and pray Thee and supplicate thee: Send down Thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here spread forth: And make this bread the Precious Body of Thy Christ; Amen."** The priest first blesses cruciform the Holy Diskos in which there is the "Lamb". He immediately continues by saying: **"And that which is in this cup, the Precious Blood of Thy Christ; Amen".** He then blesses the Holy Cup cruciform. The priest adds, **"Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit"**. While he is sealing and blessing cruciform both of them at the same time, he says the words **"Amen. Amen. Amen".**

This Prayer has approximately one hundred words that have been sanctified for two thousand years. Words that make the greatest Miracle come to life. Words that have caused pain and joy and tears of repentance and divine pleasure to monks and bishops, to hermits and patriarchs, to rich and poor, to noblemen and servants, to young and old and children, to men and women, to the educated and illiterate...

These words have been heard and are being heard and said in thousands of Churches: from the Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople to the last island and mountain country Church. From the Metropolitan resplendent city Churches to the dreadful Karoulia of the Athonite soil. From the deserts and the dens of the earth to the martyrs' Catacombs. The same words, the same Miracle...

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[1] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.289-290

153. When I was a priest in Saint Athanasios in an area called Evosmos in Thessaloniki, I had been told about a most reverent Priest that had seen an awesome vision. He was made worthy of experiencing it while his soul was ecstatic, in his room, as he was reading the Pre-Communion Prayers with all compunction, for he was about to go to his Church to serve the liturgy.

All of a sudden, he sees himself in the Church; in fact, he was serving the liturgy. During the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts, he "saw" with the eyes of his soul a most radiant pillar of heavenly light covering the Precious sanctified Gifts while at the same time an approximately one year - old Infant appeared laying before the Precious Gifts in such blinding radiance which exceeded the brightness of the sun. He on the other hand "saw" himself brightly clothed by the sacred rays of the Divine Infant.

The dreadful moment of partaking Holy Communion had arrived. Then - O - behold a strange Miracle! The Priest kissed the Divine Infant and He the Priest. Immediately after, it seemed to the priest that... had he gone mad? Was it that he had been deceived? No! It seemed to him that he was eating the Divine Infant, yet the Infant Jesus Christ was also eating the Priest, who was being Christified and deified radiantly, while both of them remained totally whole!...

He suddenly hears an extremely sweet voice coming from the Divine Infant saying: "This is My Body... and this is My Blood... for the forgiveness of sins!" All at once in the midst of incomprehensible heavenly chanting from a multitude of angelic voices, Christ the Master and God and Savior of the world, embraces the Priest and is lifted up with him in the heavens...

They were being lifted up and followed by the thousands of souls "living and reposed" who had been commemorated from time to time in the Sanctuary by the sanctified holy father in question.

After all this, the most pious Priest "came round" and not being able to endure the sacred joy of this incomprehensible contemplation, he fell on the floor almost fainted. In addition, according to what was stated, it seems that he was not feeling well for many days later...

I never found out what happened after that... I pity myself however for not taking any interest in finding out more about that blessed priest and for not finding him in order to receive his blessing.[1]

After the last invocation **"Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit"**, **"Amen. Amen. Amen"**, follows thrice which is said instead of the fervant prayer "may it happen". When the Celebrant priest beseeches for something to happen... it happens! The exceedingly great Miracle is realized!

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[1] Personal notes

During the most sacred moment of Divine Conversion, the Celebrant Priest is the ultimate Church ruler only for this moment! Following the phrase **"Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen"**, the bloodless Sacrifice of the Sanctuary of the Holy Altar becomes more a possession and offering of the whole Church, of the whole congregation, of all faithful Orthodox Christians.

It would be a good idea after the choir chants, **"We hymn Thee..."** to have one minute of extreme silence. This silence contributes to the piercing of the soul, compunction and tearing, at a heavenly mystical prayer, through the invocation of the divine Name "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me".

If according to **Revelation** (Rev. 8,1) "there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour", in order for the seventh seal to be opened not to mention all the awesome events that are being described, much more so, ought we to remain silent during the moment of Sanctification of the Precious Gifts, where all that is being ministered foretells of mysteries incomparably greater than all the events, which will take place in the world. Even the heavenly archangelic Powers "wish to hear the evangelic Voice of the Lord, God, and to behold with their own eyes the presence of the Holy Anaphora, and to enjoy the Divine and Sacred Liturgy"[1] but they cannot but cover their countenances with their wings.

During these fearful moments, the priests' heartbeats not only pulse out of emotion and awe, but also out of natural cowardice. The celebrants understand very well that despite their unworthiness, something exceedingly great will take place, something that is even greater than the Miracle of creation of the whole world. Yet, they must ask for it, they must dare to.

The first word that comes to the Celebrant priest's mouth is **"again"**. "I the unworthy one, again dare, O Lord, Lord, to ask I the unworthy one... **"And beseech Thee"** he exclaims. **"And pray...and supplicate..."**.

The expression in the celebrant's eyes, the spasms and wonder, the heart's ecstasy, the bowing of the head, the torso's inclination and the knees' trembling, the world of the senses and spirit are in a stance beseeching, praying and supplicating...

Following the Sanctification, the celebrant inaudibly says:

"That to those who shall partake thereof they may be unto cleansing of soul, unto forgiveness of sins, unto the communion of Thy Holy Spirit, unto the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven and unto boldness toward thee, not unto judgment or unto condemnation. And again we offer unto thee this rational worship for all those who in faith have gone before us to their rest: Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Pro-

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[1] Taken from the Holy Unction's fifth Prayer

phets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics and every righteous spirit which has completed this life in faith".

We have completed the Sanctification. Yet, we ask for what cause?

The Prayer says so: These Precious Gifts have become the Body and Blood of Christ, so that clergy and laity may thereof partake and commune:

- **Unto cleansing of soul,**
- **Unto forgiveness of sins,**
- **Unto the communion of Thy Holy Spirit,**
- **Unto the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven,**
- **Unto boldness toward God and not unto judgment or unto condemnation.**

◆ "Unto cleansing of soul"

"Cleansing" or **"watchfulness"** is the spiritual vigilance and awakening, the unceasing constant interest for the salvation of our soul. It also means the Christian's ability to break the soul's sensual attraction towards the body and its senses. It is a daily struggle so that the mind may not be inveigled by base desires and that the body and soul may remain pure, harmless and unchanging.

Watchfulness is assisted greatly and effectively by the invocation of Jesus Christ's holy Name as well as by having our mind concentrated on the words "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". Particularly, in the Divine Liturgy the mind ought to be pure, spotless, immaculate and perfect. Void of any kind of thought. The mind should stand completely alone before the invisible Presence of our Holy God. The Lord's Beatitude "blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"[1] is directly associated with watchfulness.

◆ "Unto forgiveness of sins"

Holy Communion offers us something that is exceedingly good: forgiveness of sins. It is known that the Lord's Sacrifice on the Cross-conquers death, destroys the authority of the devil and releases us from the burden of sin providing us with the gift of forgiveness of our sins. "...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin".[2] When we are partakers of

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[1] Mat. 5,8 [2] I Jn. 1,7

the immaculate Mysteries, we are partakers "for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting".

Our participation in the Sacrifice on the Cross is realized through holy Baptism. When we disobey the commandments following holy Baptism, the tears of repentance and holy Confession make forgiveness possible. The Mystery of Holy Eucharist seals the Mystery of Repentance. First, the prodigal son repents, returns to His father's bosom saying "I have sinned", then his repentance is being accepted and is thus ratified with the Sacrifice of the "fatted calf", that is to say with Holy Communion. Therefore, after holy Baptism there is repentance, forgiveness comes next and then Holy Communion.

◆ "Unto the communion of Thy Holy Spirit"

Holy Communion cleanses the heart from its passions, it illuminates, transfigures and it makes the heart an extremely bright dwelling of the Holy Spirit. Our body and soul becomes a grace filled dwelling of our Holy Triune God. **Saint Seraphim of Sarov** assures that aim of Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.[1]

◆ "Unto the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven"

When the soul is saved, it enters the heavenly dwellings of Paradise; nevertheless, it does not cease to receive the nourishment of immortality, to be made radiant, to be transfigured, and deified. Furthermore, it continually goes from glory to glory and from blessedness to blessedness. This means that the soul's fulfillment is the Kingdom of Heaven.

◆ "unto boldness toward thee, not unto judgment or unto condemnation"

However, as we continue with Sanctification we pray and beseech that Holy Communion may offer us a fearless boldness before God: "unto boldness toward thee". For, if we proceed unprepared, filthy and unworthy then Holy Communion shall turn into fire and burn us. It shall lead "unto judgment and unto condemnation" which in turn shall condemn us to the ages. That is why repentance precedes Holy Communion.

This is the attitude toward Holy Communion, so that it may lead "unto cleansing of soul, unto forgiveness of sins, unto the communion of thy Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven". May all of us Celebrant priests of the Orthodox Church beseech and supplicate the most holy Triune God that Holy Communion of the immaculate Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ may never lead **"unto judgment or unto condemnation".**

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[1] Holy Monastery of the Comforter, *Saint Seraphim of Sarov*, Oropos Attica 1996[6], p.360

♦ COMMEMORATING AND INCENSING

154. During the last century in Asia Minor there lived a holy but unknown Celebrant of the Most High, Father John from Gelvery Cappadocia who was the head of a family. On weekdays, he used to work in the field, whereas on Sundays and feast days he would serve the liturgy in the village's Church.

Whenever he served the liturgy, he almost always wept, sighed and many times could not stop from sobbing. So strong was his faith that he experienced the Mystery of Holy Eucharist in a very powerful way! However, when it was time for the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts his emotion would reach a peak. The chanters would reach the end of "We hymn thee..." which they chanted as slow as they could, while the Priest's prayers and sighs could still be heard in the Sanctuary. The chanters would once again begin chanting, "We hymn thee..." They often had to repeat it five to six times, before father John had completed It and would then exclaim "Especially..."

On certain Sundays, the chanters used to feel awkward whenever there was a constant delay before the exclamation "Especially..." They did not know what to do. They could not chant anything else, not even the prayer "Lord, have mercy" or the typikon (the liturgical rite), for it was inappropriate due to this sacred moment. Yet, they would not dare make a comment for they had great respect for the Priest. Therefore, one day they told the Churchwardens their problem.

- The Priest takes too long to finish the Prayer during the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts and we feel awkward. We chant and chant again "We hymn thee..." but we are under the impression that this results in dissonance. Would you tell him to be brief, as much as possible?

The Churchwardens passed the chanters' request on to the Priest who in turn answered:

- It is not up to me to finish earlier. As soon as I start reading the Prayer, the Holy Altar Table is surrounded by Divine fire two -three meters high, thus, I am not able to approach it. I therefore fall on my knees and pray until God well pleases to withdraw the fire or at other times for it to split in half, and only then am I able to pass through and continue with the Prayer "and make this bread..."

When the chanters heard all this, they wondered at their Priest's holiness and did not dare disturb him again. Thus, they continued chanting "We hymn thee..." as slow as they could and repeated it as many times as necessary, on the one hand, in order for him to finish the Prayer for the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts, and on the other, for them to feel compunction from what was being ministered in the Holy Altar.

Although Father John was simple, nevertheless, his holiness helped him be assertive. Faithful crowds would flock in his Church. Many

times Christians from other neighboring villages would come in order to attend his Liturgy. In certain cases, more than one thousand Christians would gather in his Church all of whom would weep in a state of great compunction. When the Divine Liturgy ended, it was not a rare phenomenon to see the Church floor wet by the many tears of the Christians.[1]

Of course, nowadays this Miracle as well as other events alike - how many remains unknown - are continually repeated many times. Moreover, even though there is the risk of being misunderstood, in fact of even being characterized as deceived, we refer to them. Even though such kind of circumstances and revelations are scarce, yet God allows them to occur, for reasons that are known only to Him. The events speak for themselves.

155. Saint Sergios of Randonezh is one of the most favorite Saints of the Russian people. This Saint was always made worthy of concelebrating with Angels. He had told his spiritual children a most amazing incident that he had once seen:

- My children, if the Lord revealed something to you, how can I be the one to conceal it? What you saw was an Angel of God! Not only now, but always he serves all Liturgies with me...

Another time when the Saint served the Divine Liturgy in the presence of another monk, Father Simon, who was a helper and chanter, the monk saw something awesome that was out of this world. While the Celebrant Priest was blessing the Holy Gifts cruciform saying the words "Changing them by thy Holy Spirit", he sees in a state of amazement and awe an extremely bright flame of divine fire surrounding the Holy Altar as a whole, the sanctified Precious Gifts as well as the holy man.

And the most amazing thing of all: During the moment when he was elevating the Holy Cup for Saint Sergios to receive the Holy Mysteries, this divine fire which was outpouring drew in and became a pillar of uncreated light which then entered the Holy Cup. Saint Sergios received Holy Communion in this way.[2]

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[1] Botsis, Peter, *Gerondas Hieronymos, the Hesychast of Eghina*, Athens 1993, p.28

[2] Ninika Solonos, *Russian Synaxarion*, Athens 1997, p.78

The Celebrant Priest continues reading the Prayer in a low voice: **"...Again we offer unto Thee this rational and bloodless worship for all those who in faith have gone before us to their rest: Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics, and every righteous spirit which has completed this life in faith".**

We offer this rational Worship of the mystical bloodless sacrifice to those who have in faith gone before us. Who are they? The prayer refers to them:

- The **"Forefathers"** and **"Fathers"**: Adam and Eve, their good and unjustly killed son Abel. Also all the Righteous and reverent figures of the Old Testament, like Noah, Lot, Joseph the Noble, Job, Simeon the God-receiver, and many others. Moreover, the Holy Theotokos' parents Joachim and Anna, as well as those of Saint John the Forerunner, Zachariah and Elizabeth.
- The **"Patriarchs"**: that is, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- The **"Prophets"**: We call certain god - inspired Holy men, who were elected directly by God, who were against corruption and besought the people of Israel to follow the Law and God's Covenant. Furthermore, they foretold the future, in other words they prophesized all that which was associated with the coming of the Messiah as the world's Redeemer.

The gift of prophesy is also seen in the first Church with Agabos,[1] as well as with the two men Judas and Silas.[2] In the centuries that followed, prophesy appears scarcely. It primarily works with the gift of reading the past and foretelling the future in souls that are sanctified. It is rare. Saint Cosmas Aitolos and quite a few others, old and contemporary, had been offered this gift.

In the Old Testament there were prophets such as Moses and his brother Aaron; Enoch, Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, David the King - Prophet and his son the wise Solomon, the young Prophets Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Malachi, Joel, Habakkuk, Sophoniah, and the great Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others.

- The **"Apostles"**: The well-known twelve Apostles, the First-leading Apostle of Nations Paul who walked in the Heavens, the Seventy and those throughout the centuries who were equal to the Apostles, rank among these.
- The **"Preachers"**: Are all those who preached and are preaching and interpreting the word of God under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The fathers of the Ecumenical Synods, the three great Hierarchs, Saint Gregory Palamas, Saint Mark Evgenikos, Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite and others.
- The **"Evangelists"**: Are those who wrote the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Philip the Deacon as well as Timothy who also bore the name "Evangelist". This is the way in which the Apostle Paul exhorts him: "do the work of an evangelist".[3] This means that during the Apostolic era

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[1] Acts 11,28 [2] Acts 15,32 [3] II Tim. 4,5

"Evangelist" also meant the Apostles' helper, who evangelized the word of God.

- The **"Confessors"**: Are all those who during the years of austere persecution, even though they were being tormented, imprisoned, exiled, they did not succumb and their confession of faith was sound. Although most of them were not clergy, nevertheless, they had great prestige in the pleroma of the Church. They were faith's living martyrs.

Nowadays, we do not confess Christ. We are even ashamed to make the sign of the Cross whenever we pass by a Church or when we sit at a table...

- The **"Martyrs"**: There are more than 10.000.000 Martyrs and New martyrs, from the First Martyr Stephen the Archdeacon, until today. Few to whom we pay special tribute and are celebrated by the Church with majesty are known.

- The **"Ascetics"**: Are ascetics of all kinds as well as hermits; "our Holy and God-bearing Fathers, who became radiant in their struggle". Moreover, all those who were clothed with the monastic Habit in the Monastic life, that is to say the monks, the ones who suffered the bloodless martyrdom of conscience in all holiness.

- The **"righteous spirit which has completed this life in faith"**: The words **"and every righteous spirit which has completed this life in faith"** refer to the soul of every pious Christian, who fell asleep in a holy state with their faith sound toward the only true God and who are now pre-celebrating the joy of Paradise. The Divine Liturgy commemorates all the names of those who lived in the world in faith and holiness for they too are worthy of being commemorated.

All the Forefathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Righteous etc, are members of the Body of Christ, in the Triumphant Church however. They are our brothers, who have fallen asleep and are in Heaven pre-enjoying the Glory of the Kingdom of God, awaiting and praying for us. All the others who constitute the Militant Church are faithful Christians still living on earth, striving against evil and sin. Still, the Militant and Triumphant Churches are not two but ONE. Given that the Church is one, and we all - living and reposed - are "members one of another",[1] communication and solidarity among us is a natural thing. It is therefore a loving duty for us who are living on earth to pray through Holy Worship for the reposed **"in faith"** who are in the heavens and for them in turn to intercede and pray for all of us, as is the case.

It means that our aim, as striving faithful Christians on earth (clergy, monks, laity) is to achieve a true living union with all those who constitute the Triumphant Church in the heavens. This is why we offer through Holy Eucharist the rational Worship of the bloodless Sacrifice of Christ on the Holy Altar Table!

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[1] Rom. 12,5

♦ "ESPECIALLY OUR ALL- HOLY (PANAGIA), IMMACULATE, MOST BLESSED, AND GLORIOUS LADY THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY"

We actually offer this rational Worship, not only to these categories of Saints, which we referred to, but **"especially"** to the Lady Theotokos, the God - Man Jesus Christ's Most Immaculate Mother. This is why the priest declares in a loud voice: **"Especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate, Most Blessed, and Glorious Lady..."** as the priest censes the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus.

Incense is very valuable and mighty during worship following the Sanctification of the Precious Gifts. It is our profound gratitude and Worship toward God, for He sent His Only Begotten Son, to be sacrificed on Golgotha with the Sacrifice on the Cross so that we may be redeemed from transgression, the devil and death. However, it also expresses spiritual authority and might in the hands of the priest.

The Celebrant - priests and bishops are obliged to make use of this power, in order to draw God's mercy on their rational flock! We, clergy ought to suffer for God's faithful people. To do what is best for the evangelization and salvation of the souls, with whom God entrusted us.

With the hymn **"Especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate..."** we stress, as we are censing, that the rational Worship primarily is offered to the Holy Theotokos Maria. We thus beseech that all of us Orthodox Christians may unite into one Body, not only amongst us but also amongst all the Saints and Righteous of the Triumphant Church and in fact with our All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos. So that we, while we are in the Church during Divine Liturgy, become one with the Saints and with all those who constitute the chorus of the first-born in the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, we offer our Worship **"to"** all the Saints and **"especially"** to the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos:

- **Firstly**, in order to honor them. They are the prokathemenoi, (that is the clergy who have a higher rank in the Orthodox Church, patriarch, archbishop, metropolitan and is in the first place as far as the administrational hierarchy is concerned) in the Lamb's wedding, which we minister. Moreover, they first accept the honors of our Sacrifice for they suffered with the Slaughtered Lamb and sacrificed themselves and their passions.
- **Secondly**, in order to give thanks to God for offering them to us so that they may intercede for us.
- And **thirdly**, for we and them are "members one of another" of the one and the same Body of the One Church of Christ."[1]

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[1] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy*..., ibid, p.291

Following the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts, the Prayers that come next resemble a Church invitation in which all the Saints, the "ones who pleased God", of the Old and New Testaments, are present. All of us- we of the Militant Church and those of the Triumphant - were healed by His stripes; "by whose stripes ye were healed". He shed His Most Holy Blood on the Cross-for all of us, just as He offers It bloodlessly on the Holy Altar Table.

During military ceremonies, when there is a roll call for the casualties of war, a soldier calls the names in order and another one answers "Absent. He fell for his country". However, there are no absentees in the Church, for none of them has perished! In the Body of the Church, those who have fallen asleep are also present! They are before the holy Diskos with their name's portion. Jesus Christ Himself assures it "He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living".[1]

Therefore, the Divine Liturgy is an invitation and gathering of all the Saints to Christ's supper and **"Especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate..."**! The All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos from a human aspect is the root of this Sacrifice. In Holy Eucharist, we partake of the Body and Blood of the incarnate God the Word Who in turn took It from Her. Our Lord's Flesh is the Holy Theotokos' blood, for He borrowed human nature from her bosom. The Virgin Mary is "full of grace", "Blessed art thou among women", as the Archangel Gabriel named her, and the name "Theotokos" is the foundation of Orthodox teaching.

After the priest's exclamation: "Especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate..." the people chant: **"It is truly meet indeed to call Thee blest, the Theotokos, the ever-blessed and all-immaculate, and Mother of our God. More Honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more Glorious than the Seraphim, Thee who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, Thee do we magnify".**

At this point, let us recal the story behind "Axion Esti" ("It is truly meet").

156. Father Gabriel a monk in the cell of the Annunciation of the Holy Theotokos in Karyes (Mount Athos), who was later canonized a Saint, one night while he was reading Matins, and before the ninth Ode he started chanting "more Honorable than the Cherubim", as it was written by Saint Cosmas the Melodos. A few minutes earlier however, an unknown Monk had entered his cell and attended Father Gabriel's Matins in silence.

When Father Gabriel was at the ninth Ode, the unknown Monk then intervened and with the sweetest heavenly voice started chanting melodically: "It is truly meet indeed to call thee blest, the Theotokos, the ever-blessed and all-immaculate, and Mother of our God..." Then

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[1] Mark 12,27

he added the rest, the part of Saint Cosmas the Melodos, which is already known, that is: "More Honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more Glorious than the Seraphim, thee who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, Thee do we magnify".

- Oh, wow! said Father Gabriel, how beautiful, how wonderful, how majestic, how befitting God this hymn is! Nevertheless, please, be so kind as to write it for me!

- With pleasure, said the unknown Monk. Bring me a piece of paper and ink...(In those days, they used ink and quill).

He searched for them but in vain.

- Oh, he said, I do not have any...

- So, then, bring me, he said, a big flat stone from outside.

Therefore, he ran outside, carried a big flat stone and brought it inside. The unknown Monk immediately began inscribing with his finger on the flat stone: "It is truly meet..." with his finger! So, while he was inscribing with his finger, the flat stone was being deeply inscribed, as if it were clay. That is to say, one could recognize the letters inscribed!

As soon as he finished inscribing the hymn, the unknown Monk vanished, after he had ordered that this was the Most Holy (Panagia) Theotokos' wish: from now on to chant Her hymn in this way.

This miracle became known all over the world and all the monks on Mount Athos were coming to venerate the flat stone, which had been inscribed by Archangel Gabriel, for he was the unknown Monk.

The big flat stone was sent to the Patriarch of Constantinople then, in the company of Hagiorite monks and many documents. However, with the Muslim scourge and the fall of Constantinople, this flat stone, together with other holy relics, was desecrated and eventually lost.[1]

In the Liturgy of **Saint Basil the Great** instead of "It is truly meet" the following hymn is chanted: **"In Thee, O Full of Grace, all creation -both the company of angels and the race of men- doth rejoice. O hallowed temple and spiritual paradise, boast of virgins: from thee God was incarnate, and became a child, He, our God Who existed before the ages; for He made thy womb a throne, and He made thee more spacious than the heavens. In thee, O Full of Grace, all creation doth rejoice. Glory be to thee".**

The incident that we shall now mention, took place in the chapel of the Holy Soros, adjacent the Holy Church of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos in Blachernae, Constantinople. Inside the chapel of the Holy Soros Her Sacred Robe, Long Shawl and part of the Theotokos' sacred Belt were kept.

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[1] Theophilopoulos, Andrew, Monk, *Gerondikon of Mount Athos*, vol. 1 Thessalonika 1989, p.238

157. In this chapel, there was once an all-night vigil. Saint Andrew along with his disciple, Saint Epifanios also went there to pray. It was during the sacred moment when the Celebrant Priest declared "Especially our All-Holy (Panagia)..." that the Saint saw the Theotokos proceeding from the royal doors on the Beautiful Gate towards the holy Altar, passing through the centre of the Holy Church.

The whole place was lit up! The Church was radiant! An incomprehensible fragrance filled everyone. She looked very tall and was escorted by a radiant honorable host of white-clothed Saints. Amongst those who stood out were the Honorable Forerunner and Saint John the Theologian, who were walking on Her right and on Her left. Among the white -clothed Saints who were escorting Her, some were going preceding and others were following, as they were chanting "It is truly meet".

All this wonderful and most resplendent company was surrounded by a multitude of Angels, who were censing our All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, those present and the holy Altar in an inconceivable way.

When they reached the amvon, at the center of the Church, Saint Andrew told his disciple Saint Epiphanios:

- My child, can you see, the Lady and Maiden of the whole world?"

- Yes, honorable father," the lad responded.

The Holy Theotokos fell on Her knees and prayed for a long time. She was beseeching Her Son and God for the salvation of the world as tears were streaming down Her countenance. Later, She entered the holy Altar and prayed for the faithful, who that night kept vigil again for the whole world.

As soon as She finished Her supplication, with a graceful solemn movement She removed the glowing long shawl from Her immaculate Head and with Her most holy hands spread it like a shelter over the congregation. This shawl became so long that it spread throughout the whole Church.

Both of them could see It, as it was spread for a long time radiating Divine glory and a great deal of brightness. While the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia) was visible, one could also see the long holy shawl whose Grace was scattered. When She started ascending into heaven with Her entourage, the long holy shawl also started little by little getting smaller and smaller disappearing into thin air... Everything was clothed in inexpressible splendor and divine beauty.[1]

As **"It is truly meet"**, is chanted, the Celebrant priest continues in a low voice: **"For the holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John; the Holy glorious and All-Laudable Apostles; N., Saint of the day, whose memory we celebrate and all thy Saints, at whose supplications visit us, O God".**

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[1] Holy Monastery of the Comforter, *Saint Andrew, Fool for Christ...*, ibid, p.195

"Our Church pays tribute to the Saints who are its intercessors towards God and protectors of the lives of faithful. Nevertheless, the Saints' commemoration in the Divine Liturgy is also an expression of thanksgiving toward God. For, as the **Sacred Cabasilas** explains, the Saints give the Church cause to give thanks to God. This is why the priest now gives thanks in the Divine Liturgy. So, the priest does not pray for them since he is the one who is in need of and dependent on their prayers and intercessions."[1]

We commemorate the Saints as intercessors and as members of the household of God, as partakers and worthy imitators of Christ and as victors of evil, sin and the devil. We also commemorate them as Confessors and Martyrs of Christ's true faith, whom we are all called to imitate.

158. Many years ago, in Volos, before the year 1940, the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great was being served on a Sunday during Great Lent. A small, ten to twelve-year old boy, whose name was little John, was then serving in the Holy Altar.

A reverent Priest was serving the Divine Liturgy. Before the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts, he fell on his knees and "elevated" his hands, leaning them on the Holy Altar Table. As he was looking up, he remained there.

The holy chanter said, "We hymn Thee..." once, twice, thrice... Everyone was moved. They bowed their heads to the ground. (The faithful did not use to fall on their knees during that period.) As time went by, everyone in the Church little by little burst into tears, for the Priest would not say "Especially our All-Holy (Panagia)..."

The right chanter told someone else to continue chanting, "We hymn Thee..." and entered the Sanctuary. He saw the priest in the stance mentioned earlier, in ecstasy, while little John had fainted on the floor, flat on his back.

The chanter exited the Sanctuary, entered it from the other side, threw some water on little John's face so that he could come to, and as he was coming to, the priest at the same time was getting up. The holy chanter gave the priest the censor and then the latter said "Especially our All-Holy (Panagia)..." This lasted for about twenty minutes.

They were asking the chanter what had happened while he kept answering:

- I do not know, it seems that the priest went into ecstasy while little John had fainted... They were asking little John and little John was not answering.

A young girl Makrina, who was then to become a nun and later Abbess and Gerondissa in the monastery of Portaria (Panagia the Directtress) took over and started compelling him with questions.

[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,441D

So, she compelled little John and he said that just before the consecration of the Holy Gifts, Saint Basil the Great, whose Divine Liturgy was being celebrated, appeared in the Holy Altar, with all majesty, escorted by Angels. As little John was unable to look at him, he fainted and fell on the floor! That was it!

The chanter did not see anything else, only little John did. We do not know anything as to whether little John spoke with the Saint, as to whether the Saint said anything or was just present as an archpriest in his own Divine Liturgy which was being celebrated by that most reverent priest.

We do not have any other information relating to this incident, but rather only this great true event, which is being repeated and occurs every time there is a Divine Liturgy. Only that we are not able to see for our eyes are mortal, physical, sinful and filthy.[1]

During the Consecration of the Holy Gifts, a number of the Church's Holy Celebrants of the Most High would receive "divine goodwill", that is most heavenly revelations, in their hearts.

What would they "see"? A great multitude before the most heavenly Altar...of Forefathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Righteous, Hierarchs, Saints, Martyrs, Confessors, Apostles, Evangelists and the rest of the hosts of Saints and those saved, "before the throne, and before the Lamb",[2] a great multitude of "all nations, kindred, peoples, and tongues". All of the Celebrant Priests and the people, all of them together, around God's throne on earth, the Holy Altar Table and before the "Lamb of God, Thou that takest away the sins of the world". And up there, before the inconceivable Throne of our Holy God, they would "see" the myriads of the hosts of Saints standing reverently and with great respect, "clothed with white robes" and holding "palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!"[3]

If we were to explain this wonderful state of amazement and vision of God, we would say the following: The Slaughtered Lamb with His Most Holy Blood whitened the robes of the souls of all the faithful striving Christians but also of the Saints. This is why he gave their hands palm branches, a symbol of the great victory against evil, sin and the corruption of this world. However, the Slaughtered Lamb, Christ Jesus, also took them and placed them all round about God's Throne and before the heavenly Altar. And the whiter the robe of each and every one of them, the greater their boldness, which allows them on the one hand to glorify and praise the One sitting on the Throne, the Most Holy God, and on the other to intercede for us all here on earth.

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[1] Personal notes

[2, 3] Rev. 7,9-10

The same also occurs in Divine Worship. The cleaner and immaculate the Celebrant priest - but also any faithful Christian whose soul is as white as snow - the greater his boldness towards God, for the living and the reposed.

In the Triumphant Church, the honor, glory and veneration towards the Slaughtered Lamb, is awesomely great. "The Saints cried with a loud voice, saying: the salvation of us all who constitute the Triumphant Church in heaven is not up to us but up to our God which sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb's redeeming Sacrifice".[1]

"It is truly meet and right" therefore to commemorate the Saints in the bloodless Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy, for through the Sacrifice on the Cross of the God -Man Christ all of them were saved and sanctified. Their striving was deemed triumphant as we also fight "the good fight of faith"[2] here on earth!

Following the honorable commemoration of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia), the priest first commemorates the Honorable Forerunner, who, according to Christ's Own testimony, was the holiest of all the Righteous men in the Old Testament. He then commemorates the Saints, the glorious and all-laudable Apostles and the Saints of the day…**"at whose supplications visit us, O God,..."**.

Then, the Prayer of the Celebrant priest continues: **"And be mindful of all those who have fallen asleep before us in the hope of resurrection unto life eternal, NN., and grant them rest, O our God, where the light of thy countenance watcheth over them"**.

Regarding the commemoration of Saints, **Saint John Chrysostom** mentions: "The Apostles did not assign by accident that those who departed, that is those who have fallen asleep be commemorated in the Divine Liturgy. They knew that they would gain and benefit greatly. For, when the whole congregation is standing and together with the priests are elevating their hands, as the fearful Sacrifice is being ministered on the Holy Altar Table…, how then, when we beseech for all those, can God not but listen to our prayers?"[3]

159. It was on a Sunday. In the village Church, three priests were serving the Liturgy. After the Divine Liturgy and the distribution of the antidoron, one of them consumed the remaining holy gifts of the Holy Cup, in other words he ate all the rest along with the portions of the Holy Theotokos (Panagia) and those of the Saints as well as the crumbs that represented the names of the living and the departed, all of which were immersed and kneaded with the Blood of Christ. As he was extremely

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[1] Rev. 7,10 [2] ITim. 6,12

[3] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification…*, ibid, p.351

pale, towards the end, he wiped the Chalice with the kalima (communion cloth), washed his hands and trembling in a state beyond himself laid down before the Holy Altar Table. It seemed that he could not take it anymore. However, the other priests made fun of and laughed at him ironically. In fact, one of them called his son and told him:

- Look at your father's plight!

It took the priest a long time to come round. After that, his son asked him:

- Father, what is the matter? What happened to you?

He then answered him:

- My child, during the Consumption of the Holy Gifts a shocking event took place in my chest, in the depths of my heart, as if there were a trial.

- What trial are you talking about, father? His son asked once again.

- Well, my child, the souls of the dead, whom we commemorated in the Sanctuary and especially during the Prayer of the Anaphora following the Sanctification of the Precious Gifts, were begging for mercy and salvation. While the souls of the living were asking, in a way, that their requests be granted. This made me feel that I was fading away and could not endure it... this is why I laid down completely exhausted.

This is what he told his child. To me personally however, and to my query as to how he felt this trial, he answered:

- It was dreadfully shocking to feel and see in the Holy Spirit the souls of the dead strechting out their hands and begging as they were crying desperately MERCY! MERCY! MERCY! but also the souls of the living were beseeching for their various requests in extreme agony. Some for the healing and recovery of those who were ill, others for the resolution of their family dramas, others for divorces that were impending and for harmony at home, others for their children's enlightenment as well as many other requests. (For, as we know, the problems and troubles of our Christians are numerous and various. Only God knows the pain and longing that is hidden behind each of those small papers with the names.)

However, there also was another sense...that a multitude of Priests clothed in white robes, were coming down from heaven after the Sanctification on the earthly Altars, running at times towards one Altar and at times towards the other. They would pick up the various requests and then carry them to the throne of Grace, the throne of the heavenly Altar of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ.

- All's well, I asked once again, how he sensed that he was in court.

He answered:

- In Holy God's pervasive presence, which at times expressed mainly the endless loving of mankind, by His goodness and His forbearance

and at times a kind of sorrow - in human terms I say this, for I cannot convey it - for the heretics, those who fight God and the unrepentant sinners. Then a spontaneous cry came from within my heart: "My God, have mercy on Thy people and on me a sinner".

Moreover, this feeling and experience was so vivid that I was a wreck; like a candle, I dissolved and fell down... Oh, Father Stephanos! How are we clergymen of every rank to stand before His awesome Judgment Seat?[1]

This is where the reverent Priest's spiritual experience and revelation ended, so much so that his eyes shed tears continually. I personally think that this Priest was holy. His holy death also testifies it. He fell asleep on his knees and with both his hands elevated, towards Christ's icon, from which a supernatural Light was coming out, making him all-radiant even for a few seconds according to the irrefutable testimony of those who were present.

After the reposed, the living are commemorated:

"And again we beseech Thee: Be mindful, O Lord, of every bishop of the Orthodox, who rightly divideth the word of thy truth, of all the presbytery, the Deaconate in Christ and every priestly and monastic order. And again we offer unto thee this rational worship for the whole world, for the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, for those who live in chastity and lead a godly way of life and for all civil authorities, and our armed forces; grant them, O Lord, peaceful times, that we in their tranquility may lead a calm and peaceful life in all reverence and godliness"

Commemorating, therefore, the Saints, the reposed and the living, shortly after the Sanctification, is the Church's calling for salvation. During the time when **"It is truly meet..."** is being chanted, the people of God who are attending the liturgy, and each one separately ought to commemorate as many names of the living and the reposed as possible.

In a sermon of his pertaining to these commemorations in the Divine Liturgy **my Spiritual Father the Elder Ephraim** says the following, which also constitutes spiritual charity "Our Orthodoxy has the Divine Liturgy, which is omnipotent. There is not any charity or good work that has the potential of being greater than the Sacrifice, which is ministered on the Holy Altar Table. Every time there is a Divine Liturgy on Mount Athos hundreds and thousands of names are being commemorated. The souls who are in the other world receive great valuable help. Thousands of souls can benefit from one and only Divine Liturgy. No one is able to help people beyond the grave,

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1 Personal notes

for "there is no repentance after death" let alone striving for salvation for the souls themselves, (they cannot help themselves and others); since this life's banquet has dropped its curtains.

How shall the souls who may be in the pre-chamber of hell receive help, even for a while? We, the living, shall help them by commemorating them in the Divine Liturgy, not only by giving their names in the Sanctuary, but also by commemorating them while the hymn "It is truly meet" is being chanted after the Sanctification of Holy Gifts. Commemorating the souls in spirit provides them with great help, relief and benefit. Furthermore, the living also benefit greatly when their names are being commemorated during the Divine Liturgy, since for them the harmless Lamb of God is being sacrificed, in order to cleanse people from their sins and release them from the various chains of passions' captivity..."[1]

Spiritual forcefulness, fasting and prayer, our participation in the Mysteries, the tears of repentance and leading a evangelical life, lamenting in God, being silently patient..., all of these together, keep us united with Christ our Savior, His Most Holy Mother and all the Saints; for inside the Holy Cup our souls and the souls of the reposed are united with the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia), the Saints and Christ in a kind of unbreakable union.

In the Gerondikon of Mount Sinai we read the following event:

160. There was once a monk hermit with very weak thoughts. The devil would torture and make fun of him by saying that the Precious Gifts were merely wine and bread.

One Sunday morning when he was getting ready, according to the monastic order in the Skete, to go to the Katholikon (the Nave) to attend the Divine Liturgy, the devil told him:

- Where do you think you are going? It is plain bread anyway, why do you not sit in your cell and pray?

The brother obeyed his thought and did not go to Church, while the other fathers were waiting for him. (For the monks in that desert did not begin the service if not everyone was present.) Since after they had waited a long time for him he still did not show up, some of them went to his cell, thinking that he might be sick, or dead.

When they came to his cell, they asked:

- Brother, why did you not come to Church?

He was ashamed to answer. However, when they understood the devil's deceitful pry, the brothers made him confess the devil's plot by revealing his thought. Thus, he told them:

- Forgive me, my brethren, for as I was leaving, as usual, for Church, my thought was telling me that what I was about to partake was not

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[1] From my Spiritual Father's the Elder Ephraim's sermon

the Body and Blood of Christ, but mere bread and wine! If therefore, you want me to come with you, release me from this tormenting thought and correct me.

The fathers answered him:

- Rise and come with us and we shall pray all together that God may show you in a vivid way His divine power and the truth of the immaculate Mysteries.

He went to Church and there, after the other brethren fervently besought God for this particular monk, so that the power of the Mystery may be revealed to him, they immediately started the Divine Liturgy, after they had placed the monk in the middle of the Church. Until the Dismissal he would not stop tearing thus wetting not only his face but also the floor of the Church. After the Divine Liturgy had ended, the brethren asked the monk:

- Tell us whether God gave you a sign, so that we may also benefit.

As he was weeping he started saying:

- After the Apostolic reading as the deacon was getting ready to read the Gospel, I saw the roof of the Church open, I could see the sky, and every word of the Holy Gospel turning into fire, reaching the sky.

Following the Great Entrance and the placing of the Holy Gifts on the Holy Table, I once again saw the heavens opening and fire along with a multitude of Angels and Archangels descending and on top of them two virtuous figures whose beauty is indescribable, for their countenances were radiating as lightning. Amongst them was a small Child, of exquisite beauty and grace, immersed in light. Then the Archangels lined up round about the Holy Altar Table while the Child was standing in the middle.

When the divine Prayers ended, the moment of the Lamb's breaking into four pieces arrived. This is when the two radiant young men started breaking the Sacred Infant, while in a strange way He remained intact. They pierced His Side from which crimson BLOOD came out thus filling the Holy Cup.

Later it was time to proceed to Holy Communion with the other fathers...Then in my right palm real Body was placed...[1]

With great compunction and sobbing, I confessed: "I do believe, Lord!... I do believe" and then it turned into visible Precious Bread. I gave thanks to God and partook of the Holy Gifts.

After that while the Priests were placing the remaining particles in memory of the living and the departed (sistole of Holy Gifts) inside the Cup, I saw once again the Church's dome open and the heavenly Powers

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[1] In the past, all, monks and laity used to receive Holy Communion as priests do today. The Bread and Wine separately; the Bread would be given in the hand's right palm.

together with two brightly clothed young men and the Divine Infant being lifted and disappearing into the heavens...[1]

In the Divine Liturgy, therefore, the Lord is being born and offered to us in a sacramental way. He is being sacrificed for us. This Sacrifice continues and shall continue to the Second Coming. Not only is He being offered and sacrificed, but also He is being resurrected and ascends into the heavens and sits at the right hand of God the Father with great glory. And He will come to judge the living and the dead.

♦ COMMEMORATING FROM THE DIPTYCHS

While the hymn **"It is truly meet..."** or **"In Thee, O Full of Grace..."** or some other hymn is being chanted, the Celebrant Priest in the Holy Altar commemorates the living and the departed from the existing Diptychs.

Holy Diptychs were "ecclesiastical lists", which every Church preserved. All its members living and reposed were registered there. This most holy deed, especially of commemorating the departed brethren used to be done aloud in a spirit of compunction. Unfortunately, nowadays this is not in effect, for it has been abolished, "actually the valuable time of commemoration, upon which our departed brethren are directly dependent, is being undermined and wasted during the distribution of the Antidoron (Holy Bread) inside the Holy Altar and the admiration of the chanters' melody. We will be asked austerely by God to give a good defense about neglecting this most holy duty - according to **Father Yervasios Paraskevopoulos**".[2]

The great Fathers of our Church tell us that the souls are provided with exceedingly great benefit during the time when the Church commemorates living and departed persons. We who are attending the Liturgy can pray for the illumination, health, living faith, activated love and above all that God may offer true repentance and patience to all the living. As far as the departed persons are concerned, we can pray first that they may rest in Abraham's bosom and second that they may give a good defense. "My Christ, grant them rest, forgive them, have mercy on them and offer them Paradise..."

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[1] Tsamis D.G., *Gerondikon of Mount Sinai*, Thessalonica 1988, p.45-49

[2] Paraskevopoulos Yervasios, Arch., *Interpretive Overview...*, ibid, p.218

From what we have mentioned about commemoration, we have noted something that is very - very touching and at the same time didactic:

● **First**: The Divine Liturgy together with Holy Communion not only serve the soul's needs of Orthodox Christians who strive in the bosom of the Militant Church but it also makes radiant, glorifies and benefits all the Saints as well. For instance, Prophets, Forefathers, the Righteous, Fathers, Apostles, Patriarchs, Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Hermits and Holy men... and all **"especially"** our Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia). We remember all the Saints, since Christ, whose mystical Sacrifice we serve, lived within them.

● **Second**: The souls of departed persons that are being commemorated receive great consolation and benefit. The prayer for the commemoration of the departed concludes as follows: **"Grant them rest, O our God, where the light of Thy Countenance watcheth over them"**. That is, give them rest, my God, where Thy divine, unwaning and uncreated triune Light shines. For, who knows what the souls go through and how much they suffer, until they reach the "place" that has been destined by God, in other words, reach the way in which they shall exist. The soul is in agony. It grieves, it hurts, it suffers... It needs help. Who shall give it to her? Money, perhaps? Estates, perhaps? Wealth, perhaps? Glory, perhaps? Secular power, or secular knowledge, parents, children, companion, relatives, friends? Everything and every one are unable to do anything.

161. The last day prior to his departure from this world the great hermit of Watchfulness, Father Daniel, who was an ascetic in Saint Peter's cave on Mount Athos, asked to be supported, for he could not stand by himself anymore due to old age and harsh ascesis. He asked to be taken outside his very poor cell for a while.

After he managed to go outside with great difficulty, he turned his head right - left, in a round-about way and held it up, he scanned everything and then sighed lightly, saying:

- A vain world! All is vain!... Who offers to help us in the end? Who else apart from the working of virtue, fasting, vigil, prayer, repentance and above all Holy Communion, in other words, God's mercy! God's mercy... Then he slowly went back to his mattress.

A few houres later, he peacefully departed to the heavens, for which he had labored and loved so much. The countenance of the reposed Elder ascetic Father Daniel was glowing, radiant. For how could it not be radiant, since angelic Powers were escorting him to God's Throne?[1]

He was joyous! We are sorrowful. He did not experience any dreadful dying moments, like most Christian souls do, who have not smoothened

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[1] Personal notes

their path with works of faith and repentance, who have not been washed in the baptismal font of holy Confession and tearing and who do not keep the Divine Captain, the Body of Christ, in their heart's rudder.

Thus, in these, final tragic moments the soul turns its confused look only to see the malicious demons who are reminding her of her sins and a multitude of mortal falls that have not been confessed. He turns to the right and sees Angels! I wonder how they are. Are they sorrowful or joyful? Who knows? Only the soul does. The soul who is asking for help and DOES NOT receive any. The demons of "the prince of the power of the air"[1] stirr up guilt from the depths of the soul and frightens her. It is the beginning of grief for the unrepentant person. While the Angels who are present, all light and glory, are coming to take the soul of the righteous, of the striving faithful Christian. This means that there is a struggle between the evil, dark spirits and the luminous Angels, to claim the soul. This is the first judgment, "the Judgment of the Angels".

If, therefore, we offer the rational Worship of the Lord's bloodless Sacrifice for all the Saints, and **"especially"** to our All- Holy (Panagia), how much more so for the souls of departed Christians, who are in great need? This is why they should be commemorated by: both the celebrants before the Holy Altar Table and the faithful Christians, in the Church, while the hymn **"It is truly meet"** is being chanted and the deacon or Celebrant Priest declares: **"And those whom they are remembering and of all mankind".**

However, after the end of Holy Worship the souls especially receive help when the portions of departed persons, are immersed and cleansed in the Slaughtered Lamb's, that is Jesus Christ's most sacred Blood, inside the Holy Cup. There the portions of the living and departed persons are intertwined and united with those of the All-Holy (Panagia) Mother of the Lord and with all the cloud of Saints. They become of one body and one blood like us when we partake of the Immaculate Mysteries...

Thus, in his **Divine Liturgy Saint Basil the Great** invites the Celebrant Priest to say a prayer following the Sanctification of the Precious Gifts. **"And those whom we through ignorance or forgetfulness or the multitude of names have not remembered, do Thou Thyself remember, O God, who knowest the time of life and name of each and knowest every man even from his mother's womb"**. Either we have forgotten them, or we do not know them at all or thousands and millions have fallen asleep (died) to the point that it is humanly impossible to recall and name them. Besides, how is it possible to know all those Christians, who have departed in the last two thousand years?

Yet, the Divine Liturgy is also being offered to them! For God knows them! He knows them all without exception with their first name. He knows

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[1] Eph. 2,2

all those who have been born to this day as well as those who will be born to the end of time. Thus, the bloodless Sacrifice is also being offered to all of them together and to each one separately. God accepts it as if we had commemorated their names one by one, even if we are completely ignorant of them. This is also, why after commemorating the names of people we know we should add, "Of all Orthodox Christians, and of all the souls, from Adam to this day".

Therefore, we participate wholly in the Divine Liturgy. In Divine Worship, we are living members. A Sacrifice is occurring! Thus, we should be filled with awe and love. For we offer the greatest charity! The largest! In the centuries that went by, there most certainly have existed Christians, who had no one, who had not left any relative behind to commemorate them; poor, deserted people, abandoned by everyone, even by their neighbors themselves!

162. I can recall that, during the years 1968 -69, I was in the Cemetery dedicated to the Resurrection. They brought in a departed person who was homeless. They had clothed him with a pair of pants and a flannel shirt... nothing else. No one, but no one escorted him! Not even a neighbor. He was deserted and alone. Absolutely no one was with him! It was actually raining heavily.

Then, one of the priests, Father John, suggested that all of us chant the memorial Service; there were seven of us! All seven of us chanted and buried him, with majesty, and escorted him to the grave with our umbrellas! Our charity could not have been better. May God accept it. "May God forgive him"![1]

163. The blessed Abbess Makrina, the Abbess in the Holy Convent of "The Most Holy (Panagia) Directress" in Portaria was once telling me that a lady from Volos used to ask the names of those who were beggars and had been abandoned in order to write them down. When each one of them would die, she would take care of all the funeral arrangements! She also showed the same interest for the city's poor, abandoned people![2]

Who among us Christians, who says that we do charity work and show off, does this? How many miserable fellowmen of ours did not depart all alone, forgotten, totally left behind! This bloodless Sacrifice is moreover

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[1,2] Personal notes

being offered for all those who are known and familiar to God. God who is All-Good and the Lover of mankind remembers and accepts the Holy Altar Table's bloodless Sacrifice also for all those, whom we are totally ignorant of and whom no one remembers.

● **Third**: The bishop with his name is first on the list during the commemoration of the living. This is not a compliment or flattery towards him, but the regular order of the Church and a confession of faith. The bishop is "in Christ's place and image".

This commemoration reveals the Church's unity and guarantees that the priest, who serves the Divine Liturgy, is a canonical priest of the Church and that the Liturgy that is currently being served is a true sacred act of the Church.

Every priest in every Church serves the Divine Liturgy and all other sacred acts, all the Mysteries, "in the name" of his bishop. This is exactly what the Church reveals and assures every time it commemorates the bishop in the congregation of the faithful who are present. It assures the faith of the Church towards the bishop's presence and through the bishop towards our Most Holy God.

The Holy Antiminsion that bears the signature of the local bishop, that is the Metropolitan, is spread on the Holy Altar Table. This certifies the priest's regular presence before the bishop and the bishop's before the Church; of the One, Holy, Catholic, Orthodox and Apostolic Church whose head is Christ.[1]

As the Celebrant Priest commemorates the living, he beseeches by proceeding with the Prayer of Holy Anaphora: **"And again we beseech Thee: Be mindful, O Lord, of every Bishop of the Orthodox, who rightly divideth the word of thy truth, of all the Presbytery, the Diaconate in Christ and every Priestly and Monastic Order. And again we offer unto thee this rational worship for the whole world, for the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, for those who live in chastity and lead a godly way of life, and for all civil authorities, and our armed forces; grant them, O Lord, peaceful times, that we in their tranquility may lead a calm and peaceful life in all reverence and godliness".**

And the priest aloud says: **"Among the first be mindful, O Lord, of our Archbishop... whom do thou grant unto thy holy churches in peace, safety, honor, health and length of days, and rightly dividing the word of thy truth".**

The priest's exclamation "among the first be mindful, O Lord, of our Archbishop ..." particularly stresses the commemoration of the bishop. Fur-

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozani, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid., p.357-358

thermore, after the parish priests, deacons and monks, have been commemorated, the Prayer of the Holy Anaphora continues with **"Again we offer unto Thee this rational worship for the whole world, for the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church..."**. These words express supplication and reference for all those whom the celebrant is beseeching and praying, who are scattered around the world and constitute the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, since at least two - the Celebrant and one faithful alone- represent it, comprise it and thus can serve the most holy Mystery of the Divine Eucharist.

"...For those who live in chastity and lead a godly way of life..."

This special commemoration is not an exception for it refers to those striving faithful people, who through the bloodless martyrdom of their conscience remain completely chaste, physically and spiritually, in their life so that their body may also "present a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God".[1]

As the Celebrant Priest continues the Prayer of Holy Anaphora, he says **"...for all civil authorities..."** and beseeches that they may receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit, so that they may be able to exercise their secular power for the Church's well-being, which is for the well-being of the people of God.

The deacon's or priest's exhortation follows:

"And... those whom each one has in mind and of all mankind..."

In the past during the golden Byzantine era and that of the great Fathers, commemoration would take place within two-three minutes during which they prayed in absolute silence. A bell would ring to indicate that it was time for Christians, as well as for Celebrant Priests inside the Holy Altar to stop commemorating inaudibly.

The celebrants continue the **"Thanksgiving Prayer"** and the commemoration of the living with a low voice: **"Be mindful, O Lord, of this city in which we dwell, and of every city and countryside, and of those who in faith dwell therein. Be mindful, O Lord, of those who travel by sea, by land and by air, the sick, the suffering, captives, and their salvation. Be mindful, O Lord, of those who bear fruit and do good works in thy holy churches and who remember the poor; and upon us all send forth thy mercies".**

Numerous categories of Christians are being commemorated so that they may receive God's mercy. There are those who live in a particular pa-

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[1] Rom. 12,1

rish and city, who are in fact faithful Christians. Next, there are those who travel by sea, by land, the sick, the captives and prisoners. In addition, those who are tempted and those who are in sorrow, those who are hungry and suffer, those who hate and love us, those who help and are merciful, those who are supportive and assist in the working of the Church and of priests as well as many others.

164. Father Yervasios Paraskevopoulos was once narrating that when he was a deacon he had attended the liturgy in the Holy Church of a certain village. It so happened that following "especially our Most Holy (Panagia)...", while "It is truly meet" was being chanted and the Celebrant Priest was commemorating, all of a sudden he saw two radiant young men coming out of the Holy Altar in all-white tunics, holding a censer in their right hand and in their left a candle immersed in divine light. The sweet-smelling incense was heavenly and ineffable. They stood before the holy icons of the Lord and the Holy Theotokos that are, on the right and on the left, censing until the deacon declared "And... those whom each one has in mind and of all mankind". The two young men were Angels of the Lord.[1]

A parallel is drawn with the dreadful scene in **Revelation**, which is described in the VIII chapter, verses 3-4: "And another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, [which represented the prayers and intercessions of the Saints of the Triumphant Church], that he should offer it [as a reinforcement of all the prayers of the striving faithful Christians on earth] with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."

Thus, the censing on the part of the Angels that Father Yervasios saw being offered to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Most Holy (Panagia) Mother are the priests' prayers and commemorations and those of the faithful Christians who are in the Church, which as a sweet-smelling incense ascend from the Sanctuary's Holy Table on earth to the All-Holy God's heavenly Altar.

If faithful Christians and we priests commemorate during the Divine Liturgy we in fact offer charity that is the greatest of all! And if we were to offer someone billions of dollars they would not benefit as much as they would with the Divine Liturgy!

Then the epilogue of the Holy Anaphora follows: **"And grant us with one mouth and one heart to glorify and praise thine all-honorable and**

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[1] Paraskevopoulos Yervasios, Arch., *Interpretive Overview...*, ibid, p.225

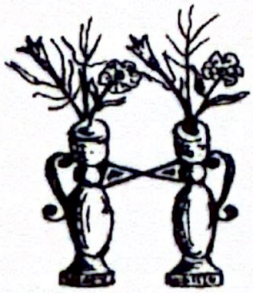
majestic name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages". The choir says **"Amen"**.

Great are the gifts of our Triune God, for in every Orthodox Church the redemptive bloodless Sacrifice of the Son and our God, Who became poor for our sake, continues. "...He emptied himself".[1] In other words, He emptied the heavens and "took on the form of a servant". He was humiliated, mocked, slandered, was arrested as a thief, was scourged, reviled, slapped, wore a crown of thorns, was crucified. Instead of loathing and condemning us for our blasphemous and most awful crime, our Heavenly God the Father makes us most worthy of offering this Sacrifice bloodlessly every day on the Holy Table. So that we may be given immortal nourishment and we may be transfigured! In addition, so that we may be redeemed from death eternal, be forgiven, saved and be made holy!

This is why, all of us - clergy, laity and monks - the millions of faithful Orthodox Christians, let us **"with one mouth and one heart"**, give thanks and glorify our Holy Triune God's All-honorable and majestic Name today and unto the ages of ages.

Yet, beyond this redemptive discovery there is also - unfortunately - the bad one too. Not all of us Christians have one mouth and one heart. What differentiates our mouth from the mouth of our fellowmen? Our ego does. What differentiates our heart from the hearts of others? Our passions do.

Nevertheless, in order for the prayer **"with one mouth and one heart"** to become a vivid reality, all of us need to release ourselves from egotism and the sum of our passions. Our Most Holy God offers this unity and agreement of mouths and hearts through the Divine Communion of the one Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, may our gratitude also be everlasting!



[1] Philip. 2,7

9. SUPPLEMENTARY SUPPLICATIONS

165. A most reverent Hagiorite priest once told me certain very strange, yet obviously spiritually sacred - liturgical experiences.

Well, he was telling me that during the Consecration of the Precious Gifts and up to the point "And grant us with one mouth and one heart to glorify..." as well as when the Slaughtered Lamb was being broken and during Holy Communion, his soul experienced various remark-able heavenly states, which are beyond logic and which resembled images. One succeeded the other like lightning and with indescribable beauty.

One minute he was incorporeal and intangible, with his mind immersed in Light, while he was informed from above that the Celebrant priest's soul "must be brighter than the rays".

At other times, divine eros would urge his soul to an eternal unity with Jesus the Bridegroom in His divine Bridal Chamber.

Another spiritual state was the feeling of being an infant in our Heavenly Father's hug, nestled in the comfort of His divine Fatherly embrace.

A multitude of tears followed as his soul was in a state of awe ent, timid and humble before the Lamb of God constantly beseeching for divine compassion, that He may show mercy to all of humanity. There was spontaneous weeping and supplication to the point where he was unable to stop, only to prove that it was clearly a gift of the Holy Spirit.

As he reached the end of the Divine Liturgy, his heart was transformed into a mystical noetic Holy Table, on which the nous mind was serving the liturgy as a priest.[1]

Many times, I wondered what strange thing these mystical and in the Holy Spirit, passages and states had for a worthy Celebrant of the Lord, who at the same time was striving spiritually, was chaste, exceedingly bright, pure and "lowly in heart". Is not Jesus Christ He who assures "blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"?[2] The priest in this case had successive visions of God's ineffable mysteries during the Divine Liturgy, in a way which although it was inconceivable nevertheless he experienced it. God only knows why.

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Mat. 5,8

The answer is that from the least Celebrant priest, who is yet a worshiper of God, to the last reverent Christian in the Church, it is by all means possible for the soul to be clothed - by God's Grace- and as a gift with one of these all-bright noetic and heavenly spiritual states. If the soul and body are pure, extremely humble, if the person feels compunction and has a burnt heart, an illuminated mind, peaceful thoughts and above all THE WILL OF GOD. Perhaps these may not make much sense in the whimsical-erratic age of ours and to us sinners actually, "of whom I am the first". In any case, God grants them to those who are worthy!

♦ "And grant us with one mouth..."

Following the Celebrant priest's praising triune exclamation, the faithful, through the holy chanters say **"Amen"**. This means that the Christians in the Church give their consent and endorse the priest's words.

Immediately after the priest faces the people by standing in the Beautiful Gate and while he blesses cruciform he declares:

♦ "And may the mercies of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ be with you all".

As the Celebrant priest is immersed and radiant in the intangible invisible and inner sacred Light of this divine and inconceivable transfiguration, he raises his right hand and blesses cruciform. The same hand blessed the Precious Gifts on the Holy Altar Table a while ago!

The blessing **"And may the mercies of our great God..."** signifies that if we are always in need of our God and Savior Jesus Christ's mercy, much more so do we need it now, as we are about to proceed to Holy Communion.

The entire great Prayer of Holy Anaphora addresses God - the Father. However, in the end the Celebrant priest blesses the faithful "in the name" of the Son, who by His Sacrifice becomes an Intercessor, so that we may once again receive the adoption: "that we might receive the adoption of sons".[1]

During this blessing, the holy chanters chant: **"And with thy spirit"** or in the past, **"Amen"**. "May these rich gifts also come to you, your soul and spirit", the faithful respond to the Celebrant Priest.

After the Holy Anaphora has been completed, the priest intones

The petitions of the following Litany:

- **"Having commemorated all the saints, again and again, in peace, let us pray to the Lord".**
- **"For the precious gifts which have been spread forth and sanctified, let us pray to the Lord".**

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[1] Gal. 4,5

● **"That our God, who loveth mankind, receiving them upon His Holy, most heavenly, and ideal Altar as a savor of spiritual sweetness, will send down upon us in return His Divine Grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, let us pray".**

We pray and pray and will pray **"again and again and again..."**, for we are in need of divine Mercy, we are in need of purity, since shortly, we shall proceed to the holy Cup. Therefore, may Holy Communion not turn out "unto judgment nor unto condemnation, but unto the purification of the soul, unto the forgiveness of sins, unto the communion of thy Holy Spirit..."

Thus, the Celebrant priest's exhortation: **"Having commemorated all the Saints, again and again, in peace, let us pray to the Lord"** is not the least superfluous. It means that since we have commemorated the Saints, again and again in peace let us pray to the Lord.

The priest continues:**"For the Precious Gifts which have been spread forth and sanctified, let us pray to the Lord"**. Which means: Let us pray for the Precious Gifts, not so that they may be sanctified, but so that they may be imparted to us.

Let us pray, the **Sacred Nicholas Cabasilas** says, so that the Precious Gifts may become active in us, that they not become impotent for this Grace, like then when the omnipotent Body of the Lord itself could be seen amongst people yet in certain towns He could not perform miracles due to their lack of faith.[1]

God does not work in us without our consent and cooperation. In other words, Divine Grace is neither magic power nor a magic wand that does surprising tricks, but Omnipotence and Providence, which seeks and wishes for our own consent too, not so that it may convert the Gifts into His Body and Blood, but so that we may be purified and commune worthily.

Divine Grace requires our own consent and disposition so that It may enlighten, redeem and sanctify us. It sanctifies us with the Precious Gifts only when we are found pure and ready to be sanctified. If, however, we are found unprepared and filthy, not only is it not beneficial, but it is also harmful.

"That our God, who loveth mankind, receiving them upon His holy, most heavenly, and ideal Altar as a savor of spiritual sweetness, will send down upon us in return His Divine Grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, let us pray".

Our Merciful God has received these Precious Gifts in His heavenly Altar **"as a savor of spiritual sweetness!..."** He has most certainly received them so that He may **"send down upon us in return His Divine Grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit".**

What do we have before our eyes and on the Holy Altar Table? The redemptive bloodless Sacrifice of the Slaughtered Lamb, "the Lamb of God

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.117

that takest away the sin of the world". God's mercifulness was "dispensed" to us, so that the immaculate Mysteries, the Body and Blood of Christ..., may be our daily nourishment "unto the forgiveness of sins, unto life everlasting and unto a savor of spiritual sweetness", without having to go all the way up to the heavens in order to receive this immortal nourishment.

Got the Lover of mankind accepts this bloodless Sacrifice, which we minister every time on the Holy Altar on earth, that is, on the Holy Table **"upon His Holy, most heavenly, and ideal Altar"**. All of our prayers as well as the Saints' intercessions are the sweet-scented incense, "the savor of spiritual sweetness" of the heavenly Altar, which comes down upon us once again, as a sacred Gift and the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

Saint John Chrysostom tells us that "even if you say Jesus' Name once with all your heart, "Lord, Jesus Christ have mercy on me", you are immediately filled with a sweet-smelling fragrance".[1] Not to mention when one is worthy of attending the liturgy and of partaking His Body and Blood! That is, with proper participation in Divine Worship, the ugliness of the face and the ill smell of passions disappear and the heart is filled with the sweet-smelling fragrance of the Holy Spirit! The face that was once brought to old age is now in its youth.

The Prayers that follow have already been analyzed.

- **For our deliverance...**
- **Help us; save us...**
- **That the whole day...**
- **An angel of peace...**
- **Pardon and Forgiveness...**
- **All things good and profitable...**
- **That we may complete the remaining time...**
- **A Christian ending...**

Then, the priest concludes: **"Asking for the unity of the faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit, let us commend ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God".**

The people respond: **"To Thee, O Lord".**

We have one common faith: Faith in God's Trinity, in the thanthropic Person of Christ and in the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Orthodox Church. Our common faith unites us all through Divine Worship into ONE common Cup.

Moreover, as you are unable to make out your hand from your body and say that it is not yours; likewise, in the same Church you are not able to

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 62,366

make out none of those who are receiving Holy Communion from the same Cup worldwide. You cannot say they are not part of you. One sees your brother in you. If you hurt your finger, your eyes will notice it, your hands will get first aid in order to take care of it, your voice will ask for help. Man as a whole shall take action for the injured body part. Yet, your brother is injured and we make no effort to help him. There is no effort whatsoever! Not towards your brother, your friend, relative, acquaintance, towards him whose love is reciprocal. Not towards him but towards him who annoys us. Thus, before we reach the Beautiful Gate to partake of the immaculate Mysteries, we ask of the Lord to grant us the unanimous unity of this one faith.

Saint Ignatios the God-bearer tells us: "My brethren, you should meet in the one and only faith and in Jesus Christ, eating of the Body of Christ Jesus which is a medicine for immortality."[1]

Once the Church received this one, holy and common faith, **Saint Irinaios** tells us, "she preserves it with diligence and believes uniformly in it, for it has one soul and the same heart. According to this faith, this is what she preaches, teaches and hands down, as she has one mouth. For, although the dialects spoken worldwide are not homogeneous, nevertheless the power of tradition is one and only everywhere. Like the sun, one of God's creations, is one and the same worldwide, similarly, the preaching of truth shines everywhere and illuminates all of the people who wish to go further in depth in knowing this truth" and want and wish to become one among them as well, in one unity, the unity of faith. The Church is one Body, the Body of Christ. It is of one soul, one heart, and one mouth.[2]

In our Church, everything is common. Our worship is common and so is our hope. Our faith is common and so is our love. The seven Mysteries are common and so is the Cup. The spiritual struggle is common and so is spiritual ascesis. Everything is common.

The One, Holy Church with its one common faith, refuses to accept not only those who have not been baptized and the faithless but also the heterodox as well as the heretics in Holy Communion. For Holy Communion, as **Saint Cyril of Alexandria** stresses, is offered neither to those who have not been baptized nor to the heterodox.[3]

We continually pray for "the peace of the whole world" and for the "unity of all the Churches" provided however that the faith of our Fathers and the Tradition of our Church will be preserved.

Yet, how shall God save us? And how are we to preserve the unity among us since we do not love, the way the first Christians did for they were of one heart, one soul, one body, one faith, everything was common to them?

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[1] Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, *To the Ephesians*, L.G.F.C.A, 2,267

[2] Saint Irenaeus of Lougdounon, *Rebuke of what is falsely called knowledge*, L.G. F.C.A 5,115

[3] Gregory Hierom., *The Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.306

10. HOLY COMMUNION

166. There is an noteworthy story of the late nun Salome, whose name was Nike Kondelaena when she was a layperson. She had once visited the monastery of All Saints in Kalymnos.

Father Savvas, who was formally registered among the hosts of Saints with the title "Saint Savvas of Kalymnos", was the Celebrant at the time.

Mrs. Nike once entered the holy Church Temple in order to attend the liturgy. She proceeded to the left side, stood across the north door of the Holy Altar, which was open, and saw Father Savvas standing before the conch of the Sanctuary performing the Holy Proskomedia. She actually heard his words clearly.

Saying the celebrant Father Savvas the words "One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water..." at the same time he poured two small glass bottles of wine and water into the Holy Cup. Oh, there was a miracle!... The eyes of her soul "saw" the Holy Cup blowing up with Blood! It was real blood! Simultaneously, the Holy Altar was filled with numerous hosts of Angelic orders and Saint Savvas was being lifted from the ground so much so "as if he was being carried by Angels".

This vision of God vanished shortly after; nevertheless, Mrs. Nike did not say a word. After the Divine Liturgy had ended, she asked the Saint to hear her confession. He received her and then she confessed what she had seen with her own eyes. Then he said in a very humble yet decisive way:

- Oh, my child! Don't, don't, don't, by God, do not tell anyone and fell silent.

After Saint Savvas had fallen asleep in a blessed way, she confessed everything, which was later described very tersely in the book dedicated to the Saint's life.

The older sisters informed me in person about the other details, when I visited the All Saints monastery in Kalymnos.[1]

The Abbess of the Holy Trinity Convent in Aegina, Gerondissa Chrystodouli (Servant of Christ) told us the same miracle.

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[1] Holy Monastery of All the Saints, Kalymnos, *Saint Savvas of Kalymnos*, 1994, p.51

Father George Kassaras who had also concelebrated with Saint Savvas many times in Aegina had seen the same amazing incident during the Divine Liturgy.

After the Divine Liturgy had ended, he went with the Saint to the Church's forecourt and revealed what he had seenwith his own eyes.

Saint Savvas then replied:

- By God, my child, we do not speak of these things.

Again, at other times, while they were going to get some rest, after the Divine Liturgy and the Katalysis of the Holy Cup, (Consumption of the Holy Gifts), Father George noticed that Saint Savvas was chewing continuously.

Therefore, he asked him:

- Father Savvas, what are you chewing?

He then came round, without saying a word, went downstairs to the Proskomedia basin, and washed.[1]

What was it he was chewing I wonder.

At the end of these additional petitions, the Celebrant in a low voice says the following Prayer, which is characterized as a preparation for Divine Communion. **"Unto Thee, we commend our whole life and our hope, O Master who lovest mankind; and we beseech Thee and pray Thee and supplicate Thee: Vouchsafe us to partake of Thy heavenly and dread mysteries of this sacred and spiritual table...".**

"Partake" in what way.

The answer is given in the next part of the Prayer. **"...with a pure conscience, for forgiveness of sins, unto pardon of transgressions** (it does not use the words mortal sins for they need to be heard during Confession), **unto communion of the Holy Spirit, unto inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, unto boldness toward Thee, not unto judgment nor unto condemnation".**

In order for Holy Communion to have the best results, for which the celebrant priest prays as he continues the Prayer, condition number one and only is to partake **"with a pure conscience"**, this means loving God and our neighbor. Faith in the Triune God and God - Man Lord, and faith in man, for he is the image of God. These two, faith and love, are the requirements of a pure conscience.

The last additional petitions along with the Prayer **"Unto Thee, we commend..."** can be considered requests that are repeated. However, they are not, for few are the things we say and ask through these Prayers and peti-

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[1] Personal notes

tions. The Holy Altar's bloodless Sacrifice is dreadful indeed! Awesome is also the time when we are partakers of Holy Communion! This is why we are constantly requesting. What is it we are requesting? They are all things that shall make us worthy of receiving the Holy Eucharist.

The Miracle, the greatest Miracle has taken place! The Bread is already the Body of Christ and the Wine, His Most Precious Blood! The spiritual Table of Divine Worship is more than ready and awaits us to partake of Holy Communion. In the ancient Church, the Church of the Martyrs, those who used to attend the Divine Liturgy, apart from a few exceptional cases, who would be excluded from Holy Eucharist due to certain sins they had committed, all the rest used to proceed to partake of the Immaculate Mysteries. Besides, for this reason this holiest Mystery would be and is still performed. Serving the Divine Liturgy without having any partakers is disdainful towards the divine Mystery.

In addition, how scornful towards the Lord are they who even though they attend the Divine Liturgy, they - unfortunately - do not proceed to partake of Holy Communion. I say "unfortunately", for it is not at all unlikely that they don't have serious obstacles for this (abstinence) deprivation of theirs, or they might also be too lazy to prepare themselves, moreso however from deliberate ignorance in matters of faith.

At the end of this Prayer the Celebrant says the exclamation that is not a an exclamation of glorification, like all the exclamations, but a final petition, for God to make us worthy of naming Him "Father" and addressing Him with the god-given Prayer, the Lord's Prayer. **"And vouchsafe, O Master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call upon Thee, the heavenly God, as Father and to say"**.

Along with the words **"with boldness"** the holy text adds **"without condemnation"**, which means that boldness and courage towards God cannot surpass the limits of piety and reverence that a son has.

Immediately all of us together, chanters and congregation, clearly and vividly recite **"Our Father"**.

• THE LORD'S PRAYER

"Our Father" is an ocean of sacred meanings. Short yet superior to all the prayers that were ever heard on earth for it is Christ's prayer, which was given as a model prayer to all the faithful of all ages. It is in fact a prelude to Holy Communion and is divided as follows:

Prologue: Our Father, who art in heaven;
Requests: **1**. hallowed be Thy Name;
2. Thy kingdom come;
3. thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
4. give us this day our daily bread;
5. and forgive us our trespasses; as we forgive those who trespass against us;
6. And lead us not into temptation,
7. but deliver us from evil.
Epilogue: For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

"Our Father, who art in heaven".

This prologue tells us that God is the common Father of all people, the common Father of all faithful Christians, who dwells in the heavens.

The Holy Scriptures inform us that through Holy Baptism we have received the gift of adoption and have become God's children. Therefore, the term **"father"** requires the term **"son"**, for no one can be called father, unless he has children or at least one child.

One can have children in two ways: through birth and through adoption. Christ, the Son and Word of God, is God's Son by birth, by nature. "Begotten of the Father before all ages," means that He is everlastingly begotten of the Father, thus He is Son of God by nature whereas, we Christians are God's children by grace and through adoption. God the Father through Jesus Christ and Holy Baptism has adopted us, that is, with spiritual rebirth.

Starting with "Our Father, Who art in Heaven", the Lord's Prayer reveals to us God's triune feature. Calling God "our Father, Who abides in the Heavens", originates from the Holy Spirit, which dwells within us through Holy Baptism. This is what **Apostle Paul** says:"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father",[1] in other words, "our Father".

Therefore, when you call, according to **Saint John Chrysostom**, God, "Father", remember that you were deemed worthy to name Him "father", for you were urged to do so by the Holy Spirit.[2]

The same occurs whenever we call upon Jesus Christ's Name: "...no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."[3] In the name of the

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[1] Gal. 4,6

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, *A Treatise on Holy Pentecost*, G.C.F., 36,311

[3] I Cor. 12,3

Holy Spirit you shall say, "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me", for It illuminated you, It urged you, and you answered by saying "Yes, my God, have mercy on me!" The words "my God, have mercy on me", comes from the Holy Spirit!

With the prayer **"Our Father"**, I believe that I am not alone, that there are other children, who are my brothers and sisters. I believe that all of us together constitute a common family, whose Father is God, the Father of us all.

The fact that God allows us to call Him "Father" shows us how much He loves us. Therefore, through this love He has forgiven us our sins, and has adopted us. Calling and having, God as "Father" comes along with certain obligations and duties that are pleasing to Him.

While **Saint Gregory of Nyssa** says, "What kind of soul must a Christian have so that he may pronounce the words "Our Father..."? How much boldness and love should one have! What kind of conscience, so that he may comprehend God's traits! That he is indeed self-love and indescribable glory, self-goodness and power beyond measure, self-sanctification and rejoicing, Purity, Goodness, and Mercifulness! Peace, Eternity... and so many other infinite traits!"[1]

And the same Saint continues with the obligations, which stem from the prayer **"Our Father"**: The light must be near the LIGHT, justice near our Righteous God, good near God Who is All-Goodness, the soul's immortality near God Eternal, and the good child near the All-Good Heavenly Father.

On the contrary, the souls that are overcome by their passions are called children of wrath in the Holy Scriptures. In addition, whoever moves away from the life of the Church is also called the child of perdition. Moreover, whoever deceives with his acts and is unrighteous and wicked, forms within his soul the father of deception, the devil who is evil and infernal. Therefore, the evil person's prayer turns out to be the devil's invocation, while the cry of the person who cuts himself off from sin and dwells in goodness, becomes an invitation toward our good Father.

"This is why when the Lord teaches us to call God "Father", I believe - **Saint Gregory of Nyssa** - continues and concludes - that he does nothing else but determine by law, the greatest and most superior virtuous life".[2]

167. One soul was saying "Our Father" very slowly and clearly all day long, while she was doing many other things. Many times all night long, in the balcony during the summer and in her room during the winter. Once her hands had remained elevated all night, and in the morning, she was surprised when she noticed that she had been standing in this position all night long, without having the sense of time that had gone by.

[1, 2] Saint Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 44,1140C and 1148A

Since she was illiterate, she did not know of any other prayer and could not describe the divine transformations (alloiosis) God granted her with from saying the prayer "Our Father". She was filled with gladness and joy... and would keep the whole world in her heart... Until she reposed... May we have her blessing.[1]

The words **"art in heaven"** does not mean being at a distance from God, for in this way what is being stressed is God's transcendence, which cannot be compared to any other size, not even to universe itself. These phrases are totally in contrast with the religion of idolatry of ancient times, which taught that the gods dwell on high mountaintops, like Olympus.

There is no space limitation and circumscription for God. He is everywhere! Therefore with the phrase "Who art in Heaven" the Infinity of God as well as His Ever Presence are being stressed. His Divine Presence is not characterized by any "void". God fills all things. He is "everywhere present and fillest all things".

Saint Ambrose says, "Heaven is at the end of sin. Heaven is where violations are being punished. Heaven is where there is no death injury".[2]

"Hallowed be Thy name".

This phrase constitutes the first petition, which is purely spiritual, like the two that follow.

The word **"hallowed"** means, **"may It be glorified"**, according to **Holy Chrysostom**. The Lord's glory is complete and does not change to the ages. However, we must glorify Him with our deeds. This is why he exhorts "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"[3] Nevertheless, the Seraphim also glorify Him to the ages by chanting "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth"[4] So that the word "hallowed" means "may It be glorified". That is to say: O, my God, deem us worthy to lead so pure lives so that through us all men may glorify You. This means that God's Name is being sanctified, when we avoid various sins through our works of repentance.

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Saint Ambrose of Milan, *"ZOE" magazine, issue 10, 1969*, p.259

[3] Mat. 5,16

[4] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F. 9, p.671-673

"Thy Kingdom come".

This is a blessed petition coming from a grateful child! With this petition, we beseech God to help us so that our hearts may not cleave unto the materialistic and vain pleasures of this life, but turn exclusively towards the gifts that are to come in His heavenly Kingdom.

The word **"come"** is not imperious but imploring. May, then, Your Kingdom, O my God, come inside our souls. May God's rich mercies come inside our hearts, inside our being, in our life, in our family, in our society. May it come, the Kingdom of peace (the "peace from above"). May the Kingdom of love come, which forgives all of our enemies, which blesses those who pursue you, which does good to those who hate you, which prays for our enemies and friends.

"Thy Kingdom come", so that we may be released from the fear of death, so that we may be released from the bondage of our passions and evil, in order to be delivered from the tyranny of the devil and of the evil spirits, and finally, in order to be redeemed from sin's captivity.

The **Sacred Chrysostom** asks accordingly "What then? Is not God a King and is not His Kingdom going come? Yes, He is the King of all things. However, as a city that has been surrounded by enemies, asks for the king's army in order to be freed, in like manner we, who have also been surrounded by enemy powers, our sins, our evil thoughts, our wickedness, our enmities, our iniquities and by so much more, ask that the Kingdom of God may free us.[1]

"Thy Kingdom come" within us and within the "little flock": "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom".[2] God would be pleased to offer His Kingdom to our hearts and its little flock that is, to those few Christians. For, it is the few who love Him. The few prefer Him; the few want Him, the few of them choose life's steep path.

The others prefer the broad boulevard, the downhill slope, where everyone ends at the edge of the cliff and perdition.

In order for the Kingdom of God to exist within us, we must also be able to live our lives as if we were residents in Heaven, the way we acknowledged it during Baptism.

As for the petition **"Thy Kingdom come"**, the Church Fathers share also a different view. They tell us that it might probably mean His Second and Glorious Coming. That is to say, that the everlasting Kingdom of God, the blessedness, that are to come and which constitute the faithful Christians' great longing and aspiration, their yearning to be redeemed from wickedness and villainy, sin, the devil and the terror of death of this present life, to an eternal life in Paradise.

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[1] Mavromatis G., *Our Father*..., ibid, p.103

[2] Luk. 12,32

168. Ten miles away from the city of Eghion there was a settlement, which consisted of landowners, animal traders for the most part. In this settlement there was also a Church dedicated to the Honorable Forerunner. A monk priest looked after this Church.

One day, most of the dwellers in this settlement visited the bishop of Eghion and asked him to remove their parish priest, for on Sundays he used to start sometimes at seven, other times at ten and even at twelve, thus violating the order of the services.

The bishop called the parish priest and asked him to give an explanation for his spiritual disorder. And the elder-parish priest replied:

-Truly, this is what happens, Your Eminence, for following Sunday Matins I do not begin with "Blessed is the Kingdom..." I do not start the Divine Liturgy, unless I see the Holy Spirit overshadowing the all-holy Altar.

The bishop admired the parish priest-gerondas' virtue and informed the residents that their parish priest's soul was holy; he was a holy Celebrant of the Most High.[1]

"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".

Which is the will of God? It is man's salvation, for God "wishes all men to be saved".[2]

According to **Saint Gregory of Nyssa** the sick mind that is darkened from sin, must first be healed, the will must be reinforced and "in the image" must be purified.[3] Thus, God's will looks to the soul's well-being, which also constitutes its salvation.

Saint Nilus the Ascetic tells us that the will of God is to the souls' advantage: "Do not pray that your wills are done, for they definitely do not agree with God's will. Rather, as you have been instructed say in your prayer "Thy will be done in me." "I personally - the Saint speaks for himself - have asked God many times through my prayer, to grant me something, which I thought was good for me and kept insisting irrationally without letting Him arrange what He thought was for my own good. And so, after I received that which I had asked for, I got very upset, due to the fact that many temptations came along with what had been granted to me."[4]

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[1] Moschos Ioannis, *Limonarion*, Mount Athos 1983, p.32-33

[2] I Tim. 2,4

[3] Saint Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 44,1161D

[4] Saint Nilus the Ascetic, *Philokalia of the Fathers of Watchfulness*, an Ascetic Sermon, vol.A,

p.222

Saint Ambrose of Milan mentions that the will of God is that peace may prevail on earth: "With Christ's Blood everything is at peace on earth and in heaven. "Thy will be done" means may peace come to earth as it exists in heaven".[1]

Saint Makarios of Egypt stresses: "This is when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven when we do not take pride against each other, not only without envy but also with simplicity we are united with love, peace and joy and consider our neighbor's progress our own, his insufficiencies as our personal devastation and his need as our own need."[2]

Saint Cyprian ascertains that, since we are being hindered by the devil in obeying God's will, we ask that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven; in other words, not that God may do what He wishes but that we do what He wishes. For which prudent and sober-minded person ever turns against God's will. However, since we humans are being hindered by the devil from subjecting our soul and actions always to God, therefore we ask that God's will be done in us. In order for this to happen, we need the will of God, that is to say, His cooperation and protection. For no one in his own power can do the will of God, but man becomes safe with His Grace and tenderheartedness.[3]

The will of God is also that which Christ did and taught. That is:

- A humble way of life.
- Steadfast faith.
- Temperance in words.
- Righteous deeds.
- Strictness of our Heavenly Father's commandments.
- Mercy to our neighbor's needs
- and ethical practice.

The Lord lived and acted as someone who is "gentle and lowly in heart", consequently we should also become gentle and lowly in heart. Moreover, Christ taught us not to judge anyone, not to do wrong even to those who made us suffer wrong but endure. Be patient and do not say "let God be your judge". Endure and live peacefully with all Christians, as members of the one Body of Christ.

Man needs God's help in order to strengthen his will and in order to execute God's will. **Saint Chrysostom** says the following in relation to this: "Lord, grant us to imitate life in the heavens, so that we may also wish the same things that You do. So, help our tired mood that wishes to do Your will yet is hindered by body ailment. Reach out Your hand to those who are eager to run, but are forced to limp. The soul has wings but is weighed down by

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[1] Mavromatis G., *"Our Father"*, ibid, p.115

[2] Saint Makarios of Egypt, *Philokalia*...", ibid vol. C p.258

[3] Mavromatis G., ibid, p.117

the flesh; she wishes to be agile towards the heavens yet is dragged towards secular things from passions of the flesh. However, when Your help, my God, is at hand, that which is extremely impossible becomes possible. Therefore, may Your will also be done on earth, as it is in heaven".[1]

The Holy Desert Fathers' advice is: To put ourselves in God's will by putting aside our own.

Saint John of Sinai equates the will of God with man's obedience to it.[2]

Finally, **Saint John Chrysostom** beseeches God so that we may do all of His will and in a way that is pleasing to Him not half of it. In fact, may His will spread to every corner of the earth, may every fallacy be scattered, may truth be rooted, may all wickedness be uprooted and may virtue return so that earth does not differ from heaven.[3]

The will of God is primarily expressed through the innate ethical law, which reigns in man's conscience. If each one of us were able to hear this voice, written Law would not be necessary. What happened however? Through Adam and Eve, the human race fell and committed a sin. Thus, the mind was darkened, the "In the image" was impaired and the will was made feeble.

After this depravity, we were not able to clearly hear the voice of conscience that exists within us for it is being choked by all the passions, which "drag her by the nose" and drown her in hell. This is why God revealed His heavenly and all-holy will through the written Law. Initially, the Decalogue (the ten commandments), which God handed to Moses on top of Mount Sinai was written law. However, the Evangelical Law is more than perfect.

Conscience, the Decalogue and the Gospel, are the means through which God expresses His will. Thus, we should be careful with our conscience, we should study the Holy Scriptures, primarily the Holy Gospel, as well as the New Testament. Let there not be any Christian who does not study the New Testament. Each one of us is obliged to study it no matter what their level of education is.

When we say: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"...we mean: May Your will be done in the heavens, in the Angelic heavenly brigades and in the joy of Your Kingdom, yet here on earth may my will be done! You must do everything, my God, according to my desires and weaknesses. Dark - bright, I do not know. In any case, I want my will to be done! Whatever I want, the way I want it and not the way You want it! Our hidden longing wants God to agree and give His consent to our will and personal weaknesses.

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F. 26, p.137

[2] Saint John Sinai, Ladder..., ibid, Oropos Attica 1986[3], p.5

[3] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F. 9, p.675

169. In the past a simple priest in a certain village, used to commemorate thousands of names. Every time he served the liturgy, in fact he served it quite often he commemorated all the names he had been given for a period of 25-30 years and more...

Since he studied Church History a lot, he used to commemorate the names of emperors, queens, generals, patriarchs, and archpriests... all those historical figures who were Orthodox. Thus, commemorating all those who had fallen asleep lasted for about three hours. This is why he used to go to Church three and a half to four hours prior to Matins, on Sundays, during feasts, on weekdays, the same thing every time for the entire twenty five years...

However, he had a vice. He used to drink. Perhaps he drank a lot too.

Therefore, once, during a nightly feast, a celebration, he stayed up all night drinking, and it had slipped his mind that the following day he had to serve the liturgy. Pilgrimages were also scheduled to come and attend the Liturgy.

He remembered it at 5.00 o'clock in the morning.

- What will happen now? What will come next?

As he was drunk, he went to serve the liturgy.

He did not take long in the Sanctuary, for he was too dizzy to see and read the "letters".

After Consecration was completed, the Divine Liturgy proceeded; he managed to partake of the Immaculate Mysteries any old how.

When however it was time to commune the Christians, as he was dizzy and since he had stayed up all night, he fell down holding the Holy Cup! No one can describe what followed...

In any case, history has not preserved what happened with the Holy Communion that had fallen on the floor. Of course, they must have found a way to gather and consume the Holy Communion; second, they must have burnt the flooring, carpets, vestments etc. where It had fallen.

As soon as the priest came round, filled with compunction he cringed to the corner and sobbed.

The bishop found out. On the one hand there was the priest's great virtue and on the other his enormous passion for wine. He invited him, told him to hang his stole and that in three days he would phone him in order to tell him what he had decided to do...

The bishop considered all aspects... In the end, he decided to defrock the priest. The following day he would announce to him his decision for his defrocking.

At night, the bishop went to sleep. What do you think he saw in his dream? He was supposedly sitting on his bishop's throne with his cassock, nevertheless he was wearing his stole and the omophorion (symbols of archpriesthood). Patriarchs, bishops, archpriests, priests, monks, kings,

princes, princesses, nobles, tycoons and a multitude of people of every rank and gender, men, women, young, old and children who were stretching out their hands, pulling him by the stole, the omophorion even by his beard and entreating him most of them by weeping, so that he not deufrock the priest.

- "Our priest... our priest... Who will be able to help us as much as he does? All of them had stretched out their hands entreating him shouting and weeping... "Our priest..."

He woke up scared and extremely sweaty. Truly, in what way was the priest helping all of these people? He called the priest and questioned him. In a state of amazement he found out about the hours, he spent commemorating names in the Sanctuary.

So then, the bishop told him:

- If you give me your word that you will never drink again, I shall not proceed to your defrocking, you shall be given not even one day off and I shall forgive you with all my heart. Moreover, continue as long as you live to serve the Sanctuary the way you have. Today I intended to defrock you. However, the souls you have been commemorating did not allow me to...[1]

This story proves that the bishop's decision was the will of God, which is for this priest to remain a Celebrant so that by being spiritually merciful he could offer relief and even save souls and lead them to the foretasting of the Kingdom of God.

"Give us this day our daily bread".

I wonder what this **"bread"** is, is it the bread we eat? Is it the various types of nourishment we intake for our diverse physical needs? Is it perhaps a spiritual kind of bread, or is it something else supersubstantial and excessively great? The god-bearing Fathers of the Church shall answer all these questions.

"Give us this day our daily bread...". This means that the faithful Christian allocates his worries that is, his nourishment, his bread and water to God - the Father, only for one day.

In addition, **Saint Gregory of Nyssa** says that in the Lord's Prayer we ask for the bread of this day and not for the many days to come, so that we can beat avarice and thus cultivate frugality.[2] "And having food and rai-

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[1] Holy Metropolis of Mytilini, *The Sheperd, magazine, issue 2*, 1996, p.113

[2] Saint Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 44,1167D

[3] I Tim. 6,8

ment, let us be therewith content".[3]

The "bread" we are asking for, is not **"my bread"**, but **"our bread"**. This means not only for me, but also for my fellow men, my brothers. Thus, he who has it must serve and provide nourishment to those who do not have any. The abundance of "bread" shall be God's blessing and an opportunity to be merciful. While deprivation is most probably the result of sin, of our attitude that lacks repentance.

Therefore, Christians must ask for their daily "bread" with a sense of humility expecting with trust that it shall come by obeying the commandments, by cultivating the virtues mainly faith, hope and patience, and by taking active part in Divine Worship and the Mysteries.

The Fathers have given various interpretations for the "daily bread":

◆ **First:** The "bread" we ask for, **Saint Maximos the Confessor** says, is Christ Himself, "which came down from heaven".[1] When we stick to the Gospel, the Saint continues, we receive as life-giving and daily bread for our soul's nourishment and the preservation of our spiritual goods, which have been offered to us, the Son and Word, Who proclaimed that I am the bread, "Which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world".[2]

This Bread - Christ becomes everything to us, who are fed by Him through wisdom and virtue - depending on how receptive each faithful person is - and "takes shape" in a variety of ways within us as God Himself knows and wants".[3]

◆ **Second: Saint Cyril of Jerusalem** says that the "daily bread", is the Holy Communion Bread. This all-honorable Bread as Christ's Body, which surpasses every substance, does not go into the belly nor is It "cast out into the draught",[4] but is distributed to all our existence, for the well-being of our soul and body.[5]

It recreates us into what It actually is! It transfigures our nature. It converts it. It moulds it differently. It makes it good! It makes us Christ-bearers, god-bearers, spirit - bearers. It not only preserves and sanctifies the souls' substance, but also man as a whole, psychosomatically. Therefore, heavenly Bread, Christ's most Holy Body is the one that enhances the soul's substance not material bread, the bread that our body intakes.

Since however, this Bread is daily and vital for the preservation of the soul's substance and even for its psychosomatic enhancement, why are you then waiting, asks **Saint Ambrose**, for weeks, months, and years to go by in order to receive Him (to partake of Him)? Is it that something is hindering you? The Church's way to repentance and restoration is both familiar and

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[1] Jh. 6,51 [2] Jh. 6,33

[3] Saint Maximos the Confessor, Philokalia...., ibid, vol. B, p.263

[4] Mat. 15,17

[5] Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Mystagogical Catechism E, L.G.F.C.A. 39,260

within reach. It is up to you to live according to the gospel and in a way that is pleasing to God, so that you may be worthy of partaking the Body of Christ regularly, in fact on a daily basis during Great Lent provided that you have prepared yourself.

"This day" is every time you receive the heavenly Bread. If Christ is within you today, He regenerates and resurrects this day for you. The day is today, during which Jesus Christ is being resurrected".[1]

◆ **Third:** The "daily bread" is the word of God.

Didimos (Twin) of Alexandria and other Fathers tell us that the "bread", which we ask for in the Lord's Prayer, is the word of God, for the word nourishes the souls, It reinforces and preserves them. "Consider "bread" the firm commandments of the gospel and "wine" the Knowledge of God by grace as well as the knowledge of His truth, which originates from reading and studying the Holy Scriptures".[2]

The **Prophet Amos** foretells that there will be a time when spiritual famine "hunger" "of hearing the word of the Lord will prevail; we shall long for It and we shall not be able to hear It. In other words, he compares the bread to the word of God.[3]

It seems that **Mark the Evangelist** makes the same suggestion by referring to the miracle of the feeding the five thousand.[4] The breads symbolize the Lord Jesus Christ's word. Therefore, the word of God nourishes and fills the souls and multiplies heavenly goods within our hearts.

That being the case, "bread", which the Christian asks from God - the Father on a daily basis, signifies the development of faith, the divine evangelical word as well as the multiplication of divine gifts.

Nevertheless, "bread" as Word of God is none other than the same Person of our Lord Who was sacrificed "for our salvation", which is the true Heavenly Bread, the Bread of Life, the Bread of Holy Communion (Living, Life-preserving, Life-giving).

◆ **Fourth:** The "daily bread" of the "Lord's Prayer" is the most precious gift of the eschatological era. That is to say, it is the eschatological Supper's sacred Bread. Thus, It becomes a fervent supplication and a humble prayer so that the eschatological Supper may come as "daily bread" today and every day, as a foretaste and nourishment of the faithful soul.

"A certain man made a great supper, and bade many",[5] The Lord says in His parable. Among "many" others, we and all Orthodox Christians are also invited to this Supper. Whoever among us answers positively to this invitation, is blessed, for "blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom

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[1] Mavromatis G., *"Our Father"*,...ibid, p.128

[2] Didimos of Alexandria, ibid, L G.F.C. A. 47,171

[3] Am. 8,11 [4] Mark. 6,41 [5] Luk. 14.15-16

of God".[1] The word "Ariston" in the Greek text is also the "Bread" of God and the eschatological symposium of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In other words, through the Lord's Prayer we plead to sit in the royal and eschatological symposium (which shall take place in the Kingdom of Heaven, following our death and the Second Coming), starting today, starting NOW.

The eschatological Supper is a gift. It is a Gift of Grace. It is a Gift of salvation. We ask that we may partake of it starting today. It is not even the hope of the age to come, but a direct request to partake of It today: "give us this day".

Thus, we note the following paradoxical spiritual phenomenon: On the one hand, there is our soul's dynamic journey towards consuming the Bread of Life in the eschatological Supper. On the other hand, there is our heart's acceptance of the "sacred Bread" which "came from above" in order for the "Great Supper" to be realized within us… His Kingdom's never-ending Supper.

◆ **Fifth:** "Our bread" as a prayer of the heart, meaning that the illuminated, pure mind, which enters the heart through Noetic Prayer, tastes by lacking the sense of taste (that is without the tongue) and is fed beyond the natural course of things by the noetic Bread of Life divine, Christ Jesus. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Not only does the mind taste, but it also contemplates without a sense of fallacy and through the noetic stillness of the heart, God the Word's features that are uncreated and expressed in so many ways, with Whom the mind is united in its heart's bridal chamber:

- Where the delight of Paradise.
- Where ineffable beauty.
- Where the unwaning and unapproachable light.
- Where the brightness of the three-sun.
- Where the unlimited uncreated magnitude.
- Where triune radiant Glory.
- Where indefinable Omnipotence.
- Where the Cherubim's joy.
- Where the Triune God's supersubstantial, unchanging, immortal, undivided, uncomposed, anarchy nature and glory, of the Triune God.

The evangelical word urges us: "ask and it shall be given you"[2] Bread divine and heavenly. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you".[3] However, you need to repent, fast psychosomatically, obey the divine will, weep for your sins every day, be abstinent, endure temptation, be patient with everyone, "pray without ceasing"?[4] Hasten through them, "strive to enter in through the narrow gate"?[5] Labor, sweat, toil, and seek? Seek and knock on

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[1] Luk. 14,15
[2] Mat. 7,7
[3] Jam. 4,8
[4] I Thes. 5,17
[5] Luk. 13,24

the doors of divine Mercy? Beg for this all-joyous fruit, which is none other than the Bread of Life divine! Persist in seeking, until you touch without handling the untouched and unhandled divine Bread! Be persistent, be persistent, be persistent, until you attain It so that you may keep It in a noetic way and thus be filled with the uncreated sight of the Spotless, Blameless, Immaculate divine Bread. May you be fulfilled in a noetic way every day and every second up to the moment when you hear: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant! thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord".[1] That is, until you become "children of light"[2] and "children of the day".[3] Furthermore, as you are "suffering for" the Sacred on a daily basis, may you not cease to cry out continually, like the blind men who sat by the wayside, begging: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me".[4] "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me". Thus, by tasting the Heavenly Bread, you need not be absurd deceiving yourselves that you are something, when you are but a NOTHING", of whom I am the first.

Therefore, "Our Father" and the "Lord's Prayer" is not a simple prayer, since it consists of great invocations enriched with gifts, with infinite spiritual power and inconceivable meaning. May God grant us all these with his blessing so that one day they may become a life experience to us all.

170. A certain Christian from town, who had very little education and not knowing other prayers, used to say "Our Father" continually. This prayer filled his inner being with joy, peace while his soul was relieved for he was able to find solutions to life's multiple problems. Many pray, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me", likewise, he repeated "Our Father" continually. Living in an atmosphere of prayer helped him spread love, goodness, mercy and forgiveness to all...

Therefore, once, during the Commanders', our Angels' feast, on November 8, who knows what impulse made him say the following in his prayer "Our Father":

- My Christ, as you forgive us, why don't you also forgive the devils, for the poor things were once angels and would also have their feast along with the others?" (It seems that he felt sorry for them!)

And as he once again started saying "Our Father", suddenly all the neighborhood cats gathered and started meowing loud, jumping towards his window, which was on the first floor, jumping wild, causing a stir. He had goose bumps. However, he came round very quickly took a bucket of water and threw it on them. Immediately, they all scattered. Nevertheless, he asked me why this happened.

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[1] Mat. 25,21 [2] Jn. 12,36
[3] I Thes. 5,5 [4] Luk.18,38

Then I told him that the demons expressed their protest in this way. The demons through these animals had a strong protest. It was also a way to assure him that they DO NOT repent. They do not wish to repent. Furthermore, God was warning him not to pray for the demons, but be content with the prayers he knows: "Our Father" and "Lord, have mercy".[1]

This is what I told him and at the same time remembered a similar incident this time with **father Paisios**, which mentions:

171. "The monks do not pray only for the living and the reposed, but also for the most miserable of all, the demons, who, unfortunately, although thousands of years have gone by, they nevertheless go from bad to worse and their wickedness develops continually.

In fact, once a monk was in so much pain praying on his knees, down on the floor with the following words: "You are God and if you wish, you can think of a way to save these miserable demons. Even though they were robed in such glory at first, now they are so wicked that all the devilishness in the world is manifested in them and if you had not been protecting us, they would have made all of us fall apart".

Thus, while he was saying these words in his painful prayer, he sees the head of a dog next to him sticking his tongue out and making fun of him.

It seems that God allowed it to happen in order to inform the monk that He is ready to receive the demons if they repent, however, they do not wish to be saved.

One can realize from this incident that apart from the great love of the monks - who attain this kind of divine love, which is without limits - God's love, Who is ready to save the demons, is great despite the billions of crimes they have committed, provided they repent.

This is why no sinner should ever despair, provided he repents, for his sins are even fewer than the devil's and he also has extenuation, for he was made of soil, and slipped and was filled with mud out of carelessness.[2]

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Paisios Gerondas Hagiorite, *Epistles*, Souroti Thessalonica 1994, p.84

"And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us".

That is, My God forgive us, as we have forgiven those who are to blame.

Saint Nile the Ascetic says that in your prayer you should first ask God to grant you many tears of repentance, in order to soften out the savagery in your soul. Only in this way will you be able to rinse yourself before God's eyes and be forgiven.

As you are being forgiven in the spirit of repentance you shall next be able to be soft and patient with your neighbor's sins, differences and hatred, which turn against you, so remission has been completed! In other words the soul softens, you forgive and you are forgiven. You are not able to forgive if your soul has not been softened. These circumstances are almost simultaneous. Moreover, the Saint continues: "If you forgive each time you are being hurt, you do what is the most important thing so that you can also be forgiven. If you do not forgive, how then do you expect God to forgive you?"[1] And whenever you say: "I repent" during confession, it means that previously you must have reconciled with your brother, with whom you have differences.

"Trespasses" is what you owe, debts. Our sins, that is. Therefore, we owe our sins like blind checks, like debts that we have not paid off. God takes our sins' manuscripts and nails them on the Cross-and with His Most Holy and Precious Blood, He pays them off down to the last penny.

What is it He asks from us? To tear the "debt receipts", what the others owe us with their bad conduct and hatred. We should forget the debt and forgive...

Do we follow this? If not, why then do we say "Our Father"?

Saint Maximos the Confessor writes: From the heavenly goods which God gives us by grace, which we guarded by the good disposition in our heart, nevertheless, sin, which is given by the devil and realized by man separates us from them. By satisfying his passions, man gets to know sin empirically and thus his soul is deprived of these sacred goods, the precious, most holy and heavenly gifts.

However, when a Christian firmly keeps his disposition far from malice, wickedness, unrighteousness, hatred, away from sin that is, and is not physically influenced, neither by pleasant nor sad things, then this type of Christian forgives everyone with real ease, even his enemies, whom he continuously serves benefactors and blesses.[2]

There is no man on earth who does not sin. In fact, one day of live may be sinful. You may ask: how is this possible? It is, for man sins mainly by

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[1] Saint Nile the Ascetic, *Philokalia*..., ibid, vol. A, p.220

[2] Saint Maximos the Confessor, *Philokalia*..., ibid, vol. B, p.256

thinking. The intellect constantly thinks in a wicked way, in a sinful way. Even if someone manages not to sin with his actions or with what he says he cannot avoid being attacked by his thoughts. Any Christian can fall into this trap - attack.

Thoughts and reflections are on such a roll that they have the power to defile even unwillingly. No matter how much we fight, we nevertheless sin through the intellect. One and only wicked or shameful thought is enough to make our mind drown in hell. While the nous is easily defiled, it is also easily purified. It is a fact, however, that being judgmental even with the mind is enough to bring darkness and degradation. A person who has delicate feelings senses a small burden within himself caused by his judgmental behavior. He understands that something is wrong. This is why we should be very careful with what we want with how we feel and above all with our senses. Man is wicked "from his youth",[1] from childhood.

Every sin is being written. There is no sin that is not written in the heavenly book of life. Whether a sin was committed by deed, by word, by reflection, by desire, or through the eyes, it is being written. It is in fact written as a debt.

Thus, God comes and becomes man in the Person of Jesus Christ, without sin - he was without sin, "he practised no iniquity, nor craft with his mouth"[2] - and takes our own debts and pays them off with His Blood and Sacrifice on the Cross.

Forgive if you wish to be forgiven. Imitate Christ, Who not only in word but also in deed taught us to forgive our enemies. On the Cross He embraced all of humanity and said "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"[3] referring to those who crucified Him. The First Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen said the same thing: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"[4] "Do not consider it as sin." Primarily, all the Saints have been patient, good, and forgiving towards all.

172. There was once an extremely good hermit whose neighbor was a lazy monk and as he was bored to work, he used to go secretly to the neighboring hermit's hut and steal his things in order to survive. The hermit had realized what was happening, however he never mentioned to the guilty one anything about. He never complained.

- For him to be forced to do this, it means that my brother is in great need, this good gerondas often told himself.

The hermit worked very hard in order to be able to sustain himself and his lazy neighbor, and thus would be lacking things, since the

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[1] Gen. 8,21
[2] Is. 53,9
[3] Luk. 23,34
[4] Acts. 7,60

thief considered his silence as a stupid thing to do, as a result, the monk had become completely emboldened and would not leave him not even some bread to eat.

When the gerondas went to partake of the immaculate Mysteries in the mornings, he used to pass by the monk - thief's cell and say:

- Forgive me brother if I made you sad.

- Ah, what a fool he is! The monk would tell himself.

As the hermit was going to Church in order to be united with our All-Holy God, the God of love, he would enter the gerondas' cell and grab everything he saw in front of him bread, vegetables, broad bean plants, dry figs. Many times, he used to take even water, for he was bored to go and get it himself from the Skete's well. At times, he also used to grab the gerondas' matted embroidery...

He would rob him and the gerondas would endure without complaint. He was left hungry and again he would endure without complaint. The monk made him lack even water and the gerondas would forgive. He used to grab his provisions, the least poor clothing as well as his embroidery and the good gerondas exercised love, forbearance, and gentleness and would even ask for forgiveness! He would rob him enormously, would make him to look like a fool and there was love in his heart, peace in his soul.

Nevertheless, the time came for the hermit to depart this life so the Skete's brethren gathered around him to take his blessing. They knew how good he was. Among them, the dying monk saw the lazy one who had made him suffer with his thefts for so many years. He waved for him to go near and as soon as he approached, he took his hands in his own and started caressing them with tears in his eyes.

- I thank these hands, he said, for they gave me the opportunity to find Paradise and taste the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thank you, thank you, and thank you!

As he was saying this, he fell asleep!...[1]

"And lead us not into temptation".

What does **"temptation"** mean? **Saint Gregory of Nyssa** identifies it with the working of the devil and says the following: "I think that the Lord attributes to Evil names in many different ways. Depending on the various

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[1] Chambakis Theodora, Abbess, *Gerondikon*, Thessalonica 1989[7], p.49

works of his He calls him different names, like devil (for he accuses falsely), Beelzebub, mammon, (for he dominates through greediness), world ruler, man killer - "he was a murderer from the beginning"[1]- wicked, father of lie and other similar attributes. Perhaps then, one of the names that are attributed to him may also be **"temptation"**.[2]

This hypothesis is ascertained by the way in which the words in the Lord's Prayer are formulated. By saying, "do not lead us into temptation", He also adds the words "deliver us from evil", for the same is implied with both names **"temptation"** and **"wicked"**. Whoever was led into temptation has been forced to find himself in a state of wickedness. This means that the word "temptation" and the word "wicked" have the same meaning.

In addition, what does the teaching of this prayer command us? **Saint Gregory of Nyssa** asks. That we should move away from what is considered to be great based on secular criteria. For, as the Lord tells His Disciples at some point, the whole world exists in an evil state: "lieth in wickedness."[3] Consequently, whoever wants to move away from the wicked one is forced to displace himself in a way that is away from the world and all that pertains to it. And he concludes by saying: My God, do not lead us into temptation, that is, in life's calamities, but deliver us from the devil, who dominates this present world".[4]

Saint Barsanouphrios tells us that there are two kinds of temptations. "One kind of temptation is caused by us and the other temptation "according to the good pleasure of God".[5] That which is caused by us, looks to harming the soul. This is why **James the Apostle** cries out when he says: may no one who is being tempted say that I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil things,"neither tempteth he any man".[6]

Yet, the temptation that is according to the good pleasure of God looks to the soul's well-being, for this happens so that man may be tested and by being tested man is led to hope, while hope actually does not put to shame, according to the Holy Scriptures: hope is brought about through testing, "and hope maketh not ashamed".[7]

173. When Father Hesychios the Aghiannanitis, the well-known Spiritual Father went for the first time to Leondios the Elder in Saint Anna

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[1] Jn. 8,44

[2] Saint Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 44,1192B

[3] I Jn. 5,19

[4] Saint Gregory of Nyssa, etc., P.G. 44,1192C

[5] Saint Nicodemus Hgiorite, *The Bible of Barsanouphrios and John...*, Thessalonica 1974, p.205

[6] Jam. 1,13

[7] Rom. 5,5

to become a monk- he was then a young lad - he arrived by boat at Saint Anna's dock. As he was going up the hill, he encountered a white - haired ascetic monk.

- Your blessing, father, says the young lad.

The monk did not answer "the Lord's", but immediately asked:

- Where are you going my child?

- I am going to become a monk here, in Saint Anna.

- To whom are you going?

- To Saint Modestos' cave, where father Leondios, the Spiritual father lives.

- Ah! You are going to him. He is not a good person. He is bad and wicked. He beats and destroys his young monks. Furthermore, he has no idea of monastic life... Come to me and I will teach you many spiritual, monastic, and heavenly things!...

Then, the young lad answered:

- No... you do not need to tell me who Father Leondios is. I shall go where God wishes me to...

After he made the sign of the Cross, he set out to continue the same path. Then what seemed to be a monk took a tumble in a ravine, leaving a cloud of black smoke on the side he was standing with the strong, dirty smell of excrement, crying:

- I am out of here, I am out of here!... Leondios, the old goat is ruining my work. He took all of the monks away from me![1]

In this true story, the devil's working is evident. Moreover, the working was as much as the young lay brother could then bear.

No temptation meets our path unless God allows it. God allows it either to put some sense into us and be humbled (according to His concession) or for the glory of His holy Name (according to His good pleasure). Yet, He never allows it in order to cause our soul terror, cowardice or fear.

We have now come to the seventh and final petition:

"But deliver us from evil".

Saint Nicodemos the Hagiorite says, the devil is the wicked one: "Primarily wicked, my brethren, is the devil himself, for he is the cause and father of every sin and the creator of every temptation, by whose workings

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[1] Anthimos Aghiannanitis, Hieromonk, *Saint Anna, the holy bema of Mount Athos*, Mount Athos 1992, p.75

and plots we are taught to pray to God so that we may be freed. Therefore, we believe that He shall not allow us to be tempted more than we are able to bear, according to the Apostle Paul: " but (He) will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it ".[1] That is to say, with temptation He shall give us the strength to be able to endure it. However, it is essential not to neglect crying out to Him continuously in humility".[2] "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" and "deliver us from evil".

"Wickedness is not part of our nature, **Holy Chrysostom** ascertains, since we ask God to release us from it: "He calls the devil "wicked", and not only specifies that we are to maintain a war without peace against him but also indicates that it is not part of our nature. (Wickedness does not belong to us, but to the devil. It belongs to us only when we embrace evil with our disposition and with our will). He is exceptionally called this way (that is, devil) due to his extreme wickedness, and because, he continuously fights against us even though we have not treated him unjustly).

This is why the Lord did not say: "deliver us from many evils", but "from evil". In other words, it teaches us - Saint John Chrysostom continues - not to feel at all disappointed by our fellowmen for their wrong doings, but to transpose our enmity and wickedness from them to him, the devil that is, for he is the cause of all evil".[3]

Nor should we name man "temptation", for in this way we are calling him devil. Men become the devil's instruments; however, they themselves are never the personification of temptation. We are simply made captives by the devil due to our passions and weaknesses. Therefore, we serve him with our passions and weaknesses. He, on the other hand, is fed by our passions and weaknesses. This is why God told him: "and thou shalt eat earth all the days of thy life".[4] The Fathers say that this shows that he shall be fed and rejoice by our own passions and our own weaknesses! We must not give him this pleasure!

Saint Theodore of Edessa says that along with prayer for our release from wickedness, our personal ascesis and our personal struggle to face evil is also necessary. We are commanded in our prayer to ask the Lord to not allow us to be led into temptation, but to deliver us from evil. For, if we do not escape from "the fiery darts of the wicked one"[5] with Christ's help and power and are not deemed worthy to succeed in being freed from passion, we labor in vain, thinking that we can accomplish something with our own strength and heed for "without me ye can do nothing".[6]

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[1] I Cor. 10,13

[2] Saint Makarios Notaras, On frequent partaking of Holy Communion..., in Volos 1961, p.43

[3] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F., 9, p.681 etc.

[4] Gen. 3,15 [5] Eph. 6,16 [6] Jn. 15,5

He who wishes to resist the devil's crafty pries, to make them ineffective, and thus succeed in becoming a partaker of divine Glory, ought to ask for God's help with tearing and sighing, with insatiable yearning and a fervent soul, day and night. He, who wishes to receive help, purifies his soul from any sensuality of this world and from God-opposing passions and shameful desires.[1]

Saint Symeon of Thessalonica writes, "Redeem us from the wicked one, the devil, who is a mortal enemy for us, tireless and captivated by mania, and without Your Grace we are feeble before you. Intangible as he is, he is of a more delicate crafty nature, and thus invents and complicates and pries a multitude of evil things against us every day."[2] And because we do not have the power to resist such a malicious, bodiless wicked and treacherous enemy, for this reason deliver us from him.

In today's world, the notion that the devil does not exist prevails. This being one of his crafts, to convince the educated world, the technocrats, those who deal with the sciences and knowledge that the devil does not exist!

Although reality is very harsh with this filthy presence, nevertheless for us Christians it can give us the opportunity for a blessed ascesis and spiritual battles with the opponent. By fighting the wicked one and his crafts, the Christian shall be able to progress in virtue and holiness.

The great Fathers of our Church even talk to us about the need of having temptations in our lives. "Cast out temptation and no one shall be saved". This means that temptation is essential as a means of salvation and as a path towards perfection and deification.[3] Do you wish to be saved? You must endure temptations, tribulations, troubles, wrongdoings, enmity and whatever else this world brings about, as well as whatever originates from the body.

The devil makes us spiritually alert by provoking temptations. Thus, we fast, are vigilant, abstinent, we pray, go for confession and receive Holy Communion. Therefore, temptations make us brightly clothed when we know how to endure them without complaint and when we run towards God for help while they come.

Temptations, which are caused by the devil, are given according to and depending on how much power and endurance each one of us has. We are never given more than we can bear. We realize that the problem does not lie in the fact that temptations exist but in the tempter's defeat, that is to say, of the unclean spirit. The devil must be defeated.

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[1] Saint Theodore of Edessa, *Philokalia...*, ibid, vol. 2, p.23

[2] Saint Symeon of Thessalonica, collected works *Apanda*, ibid, p.258

[3] Abba Isaac the Syrian, *The Preserved Writings of the Ascetics...*, ibid, p.230

The social aspect of temptations creates social demonization, which is far worse than the personal one, of one person alone. For the unclean spirit, the wicked one, not only influences individuals, but he also influences groups of people demonically, like for example, with mass suicides! Moreover, he influences societies as a whole, for instance, village communities, where the whole village is being demon-possessed, or the whole family, especially when parents and children are shamelessly blasphemous towards the Sacred. Furthermore, he influences historical periods and civilizations.

The Lord many times found himself before individual cases of people who were demon possessed. It was a dreadful scene. Yet, shortly after each demon-possessed person would be healed "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind". Nevertheless, the community of the Gadarene demoniac, the region of Dekapolis, which was also demon possessed was not healed for it sent Christ away from its boundaries: to "depart out of their coasts".[1]

What is tragic for us all is that the demoniac age we live in and in the demon-possessed society of the western civilization where we exist, even though temptations grow and multiply day by day we nevertheless remain spiritually indifferent. We have been overtaken by such demonic and deadly lethargy that only God and the liturgical life in a spirit of repentance and fervent faith can ultimately save us from the temptations of the evil spirits.

Critical is the question "what is temptation?" which we should pose ourselves and ask ourselves what we prefer:

- God or my ego?
- God or the world?
- God or the devil?

Depending on our soul's inclination, we shall be able to judge how much we are able to say the Lord's Prayer and beseech God by saying: "My God, don't place me under the noose of my selfishness, which is choking me and in turn makes me choke others. Do not place me in the matters of the world; do not chain me by making me the devil's captive, who is tormenting humanity as a whole."

In order for me to be able to beseech and ask **"but deliver us from evil"**, means that I converse with God and His Church, God and His Gospel and not with my "ego", not with the world and the wicked one. We either ascend or tumble into mud. We are either released or become slaves of the demons through our passions, which we ourselves serve, feed and caress.

According to **John Efkratas**, "When we pray to God by saying "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" we do not say may we not fall into temptation, for this is impossible, but rather that we may not be swallowed by temptation, by acting in a way that is not pleasing to God.

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[1] Mark 5,17

For the Holy Martyrs were tempted by being tortured and since they were not defeated, they did not lead themselves into temptation not even when they fought with the beasts not even when they were eaten by them".[1]

Even Job was tempted, but did not lead himself into temptation. (It seems strange, does it not?) This happened since he did not blame God and His Providence for all the temptations in his life and thus did not follow the path of unbelief (that's where his three friends were leading him) and blasphemy (that's where his wife was leading him). That is where the tempting wicked demon wanted to lead him, through them (his friends and wife) and through the destruction of his material wealth, his ten children's violent death and his personal illness. "Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore", we proclaim each time in the Divine Liturgy; this is Job's triumphant cry, as he defeated temptation and did not succumb.

Abraham was also tempted during Isaac, his son's sacrifice. Joseph moreover, was tempted with Potiphar's wife. Yet, none of them was led into temptation for none of them gave their consent to the tempting demon.

There is also an eschatological interpretation pertaining to these two petitions, which we shall convey in one and only sentence: My God, do not place us in the ultimate temptation of hell, during Your Second dreadful Coming, but redeem us from the eternal sight of the wicked and unclean spirits.

And the **epilogue** of the **"Lord's Prayer"** is:

"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

Saint Symeon of Thessalonica says: "And who shall be able to tempt us and bring us tribulation, for we are being reigned by You, God of all and King and Master, for You are the ruler even of Angels? Alternatively, who can resist Your power? No one, for You made us and You are the One Who protects us all. On the other hand, who shall say anything against Your glory or would generally dare do anything against You? Your Glory sustains the universe and fulfills heaven and earth, for Your Glory is older than the heavens and the Angels, since You have always been and still are Eternal".[2]

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[1] John Efkratas, P.G. 87, 3102 A

[2] Saint Symeon of Thessalonica, *Apanda*, ibid, p.258

In addition, **Saint Nicodemos the Hagiorite** writes: "Knowing that human nature has always been of little faith, the Lord comforts us by saying: Since you have such a powerful and all-glorious Father and King, do not have any doubt about whatever it is you ask of Him through the prayer "Our Father" at times. Only do not neglect to disturb Him every day, as the widow who used to disturb the judge of unrighteousness, by telling Him: Lord, redeem us from our adversary. For Yours is the Kingdom that has no successor, the undefeated Power and inconceivable Glory. And as mighty King you command and punish our enemies, the demons, that is; as all- glorious God, You glorify and magnify those who glorify You, and as Lover of mankind and affectionate Father, You love those who through Holy Baptism were deemed worthy to become Your children who in turn love You with all their heart".[1]

Not only are they Your children but they also come here in Your Church to love You and worship You and praise You and glorify You and give thanks un to You and eat from Your Body and drink from Your Blood "for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting".

174. Around 1520, a merchant named James lived in Constantinople. He was a Christian, yet had no idea what a Church was. He used to forget about it very easily... How was he to remember it, since he passed by it only three times a year? As far as Spiritual Fathers were concerned, he had never met any... he was a Christian in name, as we would say today.

Therefore, one day he was amazed when he heard his Turkish friend talking about the Christian faith with admiration.

- My wife was ill, the Turkish man told him. And since all of our doctors were not able to do any good, I took her to your Patriarch, Niphon so that he could read her a prayer. That morning the Liturgy had almost ended when I stood near the door in order to call the Patriarch. He came vested as he was in peculiar clothing (meaning the vestments, of course) and started reading a prayer for his wife who was ill.

As soon as the Patriarch started reading, suddenly the Church's dome opened and a beam of light gushed out from the sky! And it was not only me who saw it, but also my slave servants who were frightened! This heavenly light also overshadowed the Patriarch and my wife Fatme, at the same time giving off a very strange lightness throughout the whole Church. My wife Fatme recovered. She was able to walk! This is why I keep telling you that you Romeii, you Christians, have an important faith!

James was shocked when he heard these words. He felt as if he had woken up from a dream. It was as if knives had pierced his heart. His

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[1] Saint Makarios Notaras, *On frequent partaking of Holy Communion...*, ibid, p.43

'nous', mind was illuminated. He very well understood that his Orthodox faith was a valuable treasure. He was filled with compunction; a tear ran down his eyes for he felt ashamed. He was ashamed for a Turkish man had shown more appreciation towards his Christian faith than him. He was extremely ashamed... He was put to sleep or rather blinded by his load of work and avarice to the point where he could not see the beauty, the truth and the power of Christian faith.

The following day was a Sunday. He went to Church from early dawn. As he was in a very emotional state, he observed Patriarch Niphon, who was canonized a Saint later on, serving the bloodless Sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy. The moment of the Holy Anaphora had arrived. The deacon's words "Let us stand aright" were followed by the Patriarch's triune blessing...

As he was giving the people his blessing, he saw bursting out of Saint Niphon's hands, beams and lightning of uncreated light, which were hitting the chests of the congregation. A ray of this inconceivable light also hit James' chests! He was filled with happiness, blessedness, divine joy, and inexpressible peace. He did not even realize when the Divine Liturgy had been completed! Everyone had departed and he was left alone.

The same evening he asked the Patriarch to hear his confession, which took place in a spirit of great compunction and sincerity.

He had been living in Constantinople for so many years and had not realized what a great and holy priest Niphon was, a wise and trustworthy "treasure chest" of God's richness of love, a loyal steward of Divine Grace!

Until then he only trusted his money. However, it took him one day to change! He distributed all of his estate to the poor. Three hundred thousand (300,000) gold coins! Today we would say two billion!

Not long after, he became a monk... His active work and preaching were fiery trumpet calls for the awakening of the enslaved Greek Orthodox race. The conquerors did not like this. Therefore, they arrested him and after a dreadful martyrdom, he was decapitated. Thus, Saint James the New Martyr underwent martyrdom for his faith in Christ in November of 1520.[1]

[1] Laghis, Matthew, *The great Synaxarion...*, ibid, vol. 11, 1984[5], p.30 incl.

• THE BOWING OF THE HEAD AND THE PRAYER BEFORE THE ELEVATION

After the "Our Father", the **Prayer of the bowing of the head** follows.

"Peace be to all" says the priest.

"And to Thy spirit", answer the people.

That is to say, within all of our hearts (that of the Celebrant priest and the congregation) may peace prevail and not agitated consciences and troubled thoughts. May there be no passion, no malice, no dispute and wickedness, no unbelieving, doubtful, indifferent, and sinful thought that might agitate our soul internally. May there be peace in our hearts!

The words **"Peace be to all"** that are addressed by the priest resemble the Resurrected Christ Jesus' words "peace be unto you",[1] which He told His frightened Disciples and Apostles. Next, the Celebrant priest says: **"Bow your heads unto the Lord".**

The people, **"To Thee, O Lord".** (To You, Lord.)

The priest inaudibly: **"We give thanks unto Thee, O King invisible, who by Thy boundless power hast made all things and in the multitude of Thy mercy has brought all things from nothingness into being. Do Thou thyself, O Master, look down from heaven upon those who have bowed their heads unto Thee; for they have not bowed down unto flesh and blood, but to Thee, the fearful God. Therefore, O Master, do Thou Thyself distribute these gifts here spread forth, unto all of us for good, according to the individual need of each: voyage with those who sail by sea; journey with those who travel by land and air; heal the sick, thou who art the Physician of our souls and bodies.**

(Aloud:) **Through the grace and compassions and love toward mankind of Thine only-begotten Son, with whom Thou art blessed, together with Thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".** And the people: **"Amen".**

A translation of this Prayer follows: We give thanks to You, invisible King, who by Your immeasurable power created all things and with Your infinite love brought everything from nothingness into existence. Therefore, You, Master, throw a look from heaven to those, who have now bowed their heads to You; for they did not bow their heads to a man in flesh and blood, but to You, the Great God. Therefore, You, Master help all of us now to do good and give us whatever each one is in need of. Travel along with those

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[1] *Luk.* 24,36 and Jn. 20,19

who travel by sea; walk along with those who walk by land; heal the sick, You who are the physician of our souls and bodies.

In his interpretation of the Prayer of the bowing of the heads, the **Sacred Nicholas Cabasilas** says that the priest "calls upon the faithful to acknowledge God as their Lord and show Him their emotions of servitude; and in this stance, that is, by bowing their heads before Him they may confess that they are His servants. Then the faithful bow their heads, not only because He is Lord, Creator and God by nature, but also because we are servants that have been bought by Him at the price of the Blood of His Only-Begotten Son. For with His Blood He obtained us as his servants making us also His sons, since the same Blood of Christ not only increased our slavery but also caused our adoption.

And while all bow their heads, the celebrant quietly expresses gratitude towards God for all that He has created and asks for those things that are profitable for everyone, commemorating God and the Name of His Only-Begotten Son and His Grace and His Love for mankind, in order to ensure that his petitions will be granted. This commemoration is followed by the doxology, which the priest recites aloud to the listening throng; thus, he hymns the Holy Trinity making the congregation sharers in this doxology."[1]

Therefore, we ask the Lord to redeem us from troubles and obstacles. To grant us what is necessary in order to be able to survive physically and spiritually. To travel with all those who travel in rough seas. To walk with pedestrians, accompany those who use the various means of transportation as well as comfort the distressed and heal the sick. This same God Who is the Lover of Mankind and a physician to our souls and bodies.

"Let us bow our heads unto the Lord".

Those who are proud, selfish and who lack faith, are indignant when they are urged to do this for they think that the Orthodox Church and our faith oppresses man, especially when he is urged to make prostrations and kneel down.

Unfortunately, in his life, man makes bad choices and instead of obeying the evangelical commandments so that he may gain his freedom in Christ Jesus, he becomes enslaved to the three great tyrants: the flesh, the world and the devil. Every passion constitutes one tyrant; malice constitutes slavery, weakness constitutes hell. "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin,"[2] verifies the same truthful mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.119

[2] Jn. 8,34

The bending of the knees is also evident in the Holy Scripture and is a sign of extreme humility before the Omnipotent God, for Christ the Savior also "having bended the knees, prayed".[1] The Lord knelt down! He was God-Man! Perfect God and perfect man... and he knelt down to pray!

When you kneel down and make a prostration (metanoia), you crush yourself; you declare Christ's Death and Resurrection. The old man perishes and the new one is resurrected. In fact, the bowing of the head underlies this most reverent humility for it humbles proud thoughts.

During the awesome moment of "elevation" man as a whole must be humbled before the greatest Miracle of Miracles of the Conversion of Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The bowing of the head, kneeling and repentance belong exclusively to our awesome God!

Immediately after follows the exclamation, **"Through the grace and compassions and love toward mankind of Thine only-begotten Son, with whom Thou art blessed, together with Thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".**

The people say: **"Amen"**.

Which means: May all the gifts and goods, which we asked from God who is Awesome and Great, be granted to us all, with the Grace and Compassions of Christ the Savior, to Whom belongs every glory, honor and veneration.

It is as if the Celebrant priest is making a dramatic leap by putting everything aside in order to proceed to the all-heavenly Altar and with a bowing head and trembling voice prays **"Hear us, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, from Thy holy dwelling-place and from the Throne of glory of Thy Kingdom; and come to sanctify us, O Thou Who sittest on high with the Father and art here invisibly present with us; and vouchsafe by Thy mighty hand to impart unto us Thine immaculate Body and precious Blood, and through us unto all the people"**.

The meaning of this Prayer is the following: Lord, give heed to us with kindness. Deign from Your Throne in the highest and look upon us sinners with sympathy. Come from Your most holy dwelling and Your triune throne of Your Kingdom. Lord, it is not necessary to move away from Your most heavenly dwellings, where You sit most gloriously with Your Father and are praised and worshipped by the numerous hosts of Angels and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim! Now and ever You Are **"Thou Who sittest on high with the Father"** and are present among us. Yet, in what way are You present? As tenderhearted Father and Lover of mankind, or as wrathful and awesome Judge for some of us? Nevertheless, we beseech You to come as Lover of mankind and Archpriest and Mediator, so that You may sanctify all of us.

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[1] Luk. 22,41

Come, Lord Jesus Christ, in order for You to impart **"invisibly"** to us, by Your mighty Hand, Your Immaculate Body and Your Precious Blood... and then **"through us"** the unworthy priests, also impart Them to all Your people.

This is the third Prayer that is directly addressed by the Celebrant priest to Jesus Christ, not to the Heavenly Father. (The first one is the Gospel Prayer, the second one is the Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn and the third one, is said now shortly prior to the Elevation.)

It is addressed to Christ for three reasons:

- **First:** For Christ is the Founder of the Mystery of Divine Worship. He is the Victim, the Most Blameless Lamb, from Which the Body and Blood is taken.
- **Second:** For He Himself gave This for food and drink, firstly to His Disciples, of whom the Celebrant Priest is tradition's successor.
- **And third:** For He Christ Himself commanded His Apostles to impart His Body and His Blood through Divine Worship to those who believe in His holy Name and obey His evangelical commandments.

This is why the Prayer reminds us that These holy Gifts here spread forth, are the same that the Lord delivered on Great and Holy Thursday night. Therefore, this Prayer gives us the inner feeling and confidence that the Lord's Presence is direct. God is Present! He is before us and is also within us! Here, before his eyes, the Celebrant Priest sees the Lamb of God and addresses the words of this Prayer.

Jesus Christ is Present. The Bread and Wine are not symbols of the divine Body and Blood, but the Lamb's same Body and Blood, Who was slaughtered and His slaughter continues bloodlessly for the salvation of the whole world.

On the Holy Altar Table and under the Platytera, there is always the icon of the Divine Liturgy, the moment when the Eternal Archpriest Jesus Christ is imparting, like during the Mystical Supper, to His Disciples His Body and Blood. The same image is described by the words of this Prayer:**"...by Thy mighty hand impart unto us Thine immaculate Body and precious Blood"**.

The Great and Eternal Archpriest Jesus Christ communes the priests and with the hands of the priests, He communicates the people. Woe to us, for we do not have the slightest clue! Christ communes us and we commune you. The priest is an Instrument of God and a servant of the people. All of us priests are "servants' servants"! We shall give a burdensome account before our Holy God...

175. An example of such a humble servant was Father Gregory the Spiritual Father.

According to his narration, it was Great and Holy Thursday. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, in the small Church that was inside his hut, a young Monk appeared holding a vigil lamp that was lit. He en-

tered the Holy Altar and told Father Gregory:

- Holy Spiritual Father, please, do not consume the entire Holy Communion, for it is necessary for you to commune three brothers who live further away from here. For this reason I have come to take you.

He immediately tidied himself up and without saying a word, he followed the Monk. The young Monk was walking in front and Father Gregory was right behind Him with the immaculate Mysteries.

Although the hill was precipitous and steep, the paths were situated between and on the rocks and even though he was old, he did not feel tired or sad; finally, they reached a spacious cave where three elderly ascetics were waiting.

They partook of the immaculate Mysteries and after they had thanked him, they told him in an exhorting way:

- Holy father, may you also come next year on Great and Holy Thursday in order to commune us, without however saying anything about what you saw here.

He gave them his promise without saying a word and returned escorted by the young Monk.

The young Monk made a prostration (metanoia) at the Church's entrance, kissed the Holy Cup and in a sweet voice told him that he would again be coming back the following year, for the same ministry. As Father Gregory was on his way, he turned his head in order to see the young Monk walking on the path, but no one could see him anywhere...

Father Gregory was in a state of shock. Nevertheless, as he wished to keep his promise, he did not say a word to anyone. This incident occurred in the same way for two consecutive years. Thus, Pascha was approaching for the fourth year in a row.

On Saturday of Righteous Lazarus, all the fathers in the Skete were having an all-night vigil in the Kyriakon for Palm Sunday. After the all-night vigil had ended and everyone went to the synodikon for their treat, they talked about whether there are any old anchorites or the order of the Blessed ones (Makaron) who were only a few in number. Most of them were saying with certainty that gone are the good old days for monasticism had been declining during their years (it was approximately during the 1890's). Then all of a sudden - either out of carelessness or out of fascination - Father Gregory said:

- They also exist today, with the Grace of God.
- Where? They asked him.
- Well, up here, pointing with his hand, on Emonas, located before Mount Athos.

Everyone was impressed by his confession, yet they did not say a word. Father Gregory returned to his hut, in the desert, as he was sad and regretful for this untimely revelation.

Four days later, the same young Monk appeared once again and

after he had winked he took the Holy and Precious Gifts. Father Gregory followed him and they once again found themselves in the cave, where these three blessed Hermits partook of the immaculate Mysteries.

Then the oldest of them told him:

- Why, holy Spiritual father, did you disobey our command by making us known to the brothers?

Father Gregory did not answer...

- But for your idle talk, do not come with the holy Mysteries next year. If, however, you come you shall find us as our Most Merciful God wishes. Again we beseech you, do not reveal us...

He left in a state of compunction and amazement. Nevertheless, he realized that he was dealing with Holy men, with blessed and holy Anachorites, of those who are rare even in each generation of monks.

The following year, neither did Father Gregory commune the three hermits nor did the young Monk show up. Taking with him only the Antidoron and Holy Water, he ascended the hill this time with great difficulty until he reached the cave. After he had searched for it, he found it.

He found the three holy Anachorites dead. The entire cave was filled with an inexpressible sweet -smelling fragrance...They were lying down with their hands cruciform on their chests. He knelt down and kissed their hands and foreheads. For a moment, he thought he was drunk by the divinely originated sweet-smelling fragrance of their holy Relics. He was informed within himself that their dryness was because they had fallen asleep right after they had received Holy Communion on Great and Holy Thursday of the previous year...

The young Monk, who was showing him the way with the help of a vigil lamp, was definitely an Angel of the Lord, who was serving those three Holy Anachorites... that belonged to the order of the Makaron (Blessed).[1]

There are still saints nowadays. They supplicate God, they are the ones who sustain us, and they are the ones who save us. (Along with the innocent, the guilty are also saved, while usually "the innocent suffer along with the guilty". However, in spiritual life exactly the opposite occurs: the guilty are also saved along with the innocent.) We sinners of whom we are the most - billions of sinners of which the least are holy - these holy men, with their great spiritual health, with their holy life, with their most graceful countenance, with their most pure ethos as well as with their illuminated nous, pray and supplicate and save and sustain us in life. They will keep saving us

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[1] Gabriel Dionysiatis, Arch., *From grandfather's garden*, The Garden of the Most Holy Theotokos publ., 1994, p.71

"until an opportune time". Especially this category of Blessed people on Mount Athos, constitute the hope of the age to come, they are the dough of the "little flock", which God shall never abandon.

If we cultivate faith and patience, holy patience every day and pray **"Hear us, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, from Thy holy dwelling-place..."**, God glances "from His Holy dwelling-place", and thus sustains such saints, like those mentioned earlier, in our lives, so that we may all be saved.

Commenting on this most heavenly Prayer, the one prior to the Elevation, **holy John Chrysostom** mentions: "When Prophet Elijah ascended into heaven, he left Elisha, his disciple, his sheepskin, however, when the Son of God ascended into heaven, He left us His Deified Flesh. On the one hand, Prophet Elijah left his sheepskin, after he took it off, and on the other, Christ BOTH left His flesh and ascended with It, so that the whole human race would be sanctified through It.

Following His Ascension, the Lord sits with his Heavenly Father in the heavens and at the same time, He is present with the faithful Christians in the Divine Liturgy. He is **"who sittest on high with the Father and is here invisibly present with us"**. This moment, but most of all during the Divine Worship, He is **"here invisibly present with us"**. His Presence fills the earth (especially the Holy Church during the Divine Worship) and the heavens! Thus, together with Christ, the Christian who is in the Church and communes is at the same time on earth and in heaven. "In heaven above and on earth we are together".[1]

- In the Heavens **"Above"**: inside the Father's bosom.
- **"Down"** on Earth: inside the Church's bosom.

The faithful Christian experiences the above based on what he experiences on earth. The Heavenly and farthly Altar "unite all to one another" into One Faith in the One Church, in ONE CHRIST! The faithful is able to see the invisible in an incomprehensible way, is able to hear the inexpressible, to scent immortality, to taste eternity. This is why people who do not participate in the Divine Liturgy cease to exist. They are dead! For only Christ is the Life and the Light and the Truth.

Nowadays people do not attend the Divine Liturgy. We are so hard-hearted and unfaithful that it is a natural thing for Christians not to attend the Divine Liturgy, whereas it is unnatural for them to go to Church, go for confession and partake of the immaculate Mysteries regularly. In fact, this is what Christians themselves consider, from our own false perceptions!

As long as we are carnal, wicked, and evil and generally, sinful, Christ is a STRANGER to us, He is the great Absentee, although He is "ever Pre-

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 49,46

sent". We lack the holy sensation of the Lord's divine Presence! Not only is there a void within us, but also our minds are filled with darkness! We are among people and we are alone and deserted. We feel so lonely that we do not know how to fill in the void in our empty soul.

This is why Christ is Absent when the unworthy receive Holy Communion, although He is incomprehensibly ever Present. Christ Who "sits together with the Father" in the heavens, is also with us during the Divine Liturgy. He is not only with us but also within us when we partake of the Immaculate Mysteries.

"In Divine Worship, one priest says, and especially in the Consecration of Precious Gifts, you experience a sense of very strange divine-like warmth. Moreover, as the Holy Eucharist flows, this warmth changes into a sense of inexpressible freshness, for through it you are refreshed by the most sweet breeze of the Holy Spirit. As soon as you say or hear: **"Let us attend. The Holy Things are for the holy"**, you are enthralled by incomprehensible melodies that are beyond this world".[1]

176. When for the first time I went to Mount Athos in 1959, the Holy Monastery of Saint Dionysius was one of the first places I visited. There I met the Abbott Father Gabriel the Elder. (He has already fallen asleep in a holy way.) When he heard that my name was Stephanos (Stephen), he told me the following fascinating story, which had occurred a year before, in July 1958.

In Karyes the administrative capital of Mount Athos, reside the twenty representatives of the Holy Monasteries. They have 'konakia' (small dwellings) with one or two kellis (housing a small group of monastics who live a life separate from and stricter than the larger monastic community) and a small Church. The small Church of the small dwelling of the Monastery of Dionysius was built in honor of the First Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen. Father Dometios who was the representative then, had invited a Russian priest by the name of Father Nikostratos, in order to serve the Divine Liturgy in the small dwelling.

According to the testimony not only of the representative but also of the other monks, Father Nikostratos had come at the end of Matins. He stood at the small Church's door and did not enter. In fact, his stance indicated reverence and great respect. He was in a state of amazement in a way. It was as if he was looking at something extremely wonderful.

After Father Dometios had seen him, he approached him, told him to get in and read the entrance prayers, to take kairos prior to the Divine Liturgy.

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[1] Personal notes

- Come in, my father, to read the prayers, to take kairos, Father Dometius the representative tells him.

- What are you telling me, my father... for there is another Priest Who is serving inside, what should I do?

Astonished, the representative says:

- The Liturgy with another Priest inside?...

- Why, there is a Liturgy going on, for a while ago a brightly clothed Deacon censed you and the holy icons and just now entered the Sanctuary. How can you explain this? For your Deacon was clothed in a radiant robe and as he was holding a gold censer, he censed all of you and just now, as I told you, entered the Sanctuary. Is He serving the Liturgy by Himself, without a priest?

As soon as the representative and other monks heard this, they instantly realized that the reverent Father Nicostratus must have seen a divine vision, in fact with Archdeacon Stephen. Later, all of them together besought him to enter the Church in order to concelebrate with the extremely bright Deacon..., whom they were not able to see.

After he had received a lot of pressure and pleading on the part of the monks, he accepted, read the entrance prayers "took kairos" and entered the Holy Altar. However, since he did not see anyone, he then came round from the state of amazement; therefore with many tears in his eyes and great fear he served the Divine Liturgy.

That Divine Liturgy was to remain unforgettable to many.

In the end, he confessed:

- There is a lot of Grace in this small Church of yours. The First Martyr loves you very much. For it is a great thing to be censed by Saint Stephen![1]

Truly, how many times do Angels and Archangels not cense the Churches and the faithful during Divine Worship? Not at all unlikely, not only Angels but also Deacons and Saints of the Triumphant Church as well!

The priest in a low voice, with his head bowed, with bent knees and in fear says the Prayer before the Elevation: **"Hear us, O Lord Jesus Christ our God...".**

Then he gets up and with trembling hands, with the three fingers in each hand, holds the Lord's Body, elevates It high, over the Holy Diskos and cries out in a loud voice:

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[1] Personal notes

(This event has been recorded today by Lazarus Monk, in his book *Stories from Saint Dionysius Monastery*, Mount Athos 2000, p.163)

♦ "LET US ATTEND. THE HOLY THINGS ARE FOR THE HOLY".

This exclamation tells us "Let us take heed! The Holy things are for the holy.

Saint Cyril stresses, "The present Gifts are Holy, for they received the descent of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, all of us are also holy, for we were made worthy of the workings of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holies are meet for the holy".[1]

Saint John Chrysostom says: "As the Celebrant Priest stands in the Holy Altar and before the Holy Altar Table with a booming voice, which causes fear, with his hands elevated for he is holding the most holy Body, in deep silence, he cries: "The Holy Things are for the holy". Thus, he invites some to receive Holy Communion (they are the ones who are worthy, the pure, the holy, the ones that are prepared) and to some others he prohibits it (they are the ones who are unworthy, the unclean, the unprepared, the unrepentant), not with his hand but with his voice, which is stronger than his hand...

And the golden-tongued (one who speaks great) Saint continues: "If someone is not holy, may he not draw near. And it is not enough to be merely clean from sins, but holy. For abstaining from sin does not make someone holy, since the presence of the Holy Spirit as well as the richness of his good works are also required. I do not wish, he says, you to be merely released from the mire, but also that you be white and beautiful and all-blameless. Not everyone is allowed to approach the immaculate Mysteries. Not everyone is allowed to drink from this life-preserving Fountain.

This is why the priest does not invite just anybody. By holding the Lord's most holy Body in his hands, he invites those who are heading towards holiness: "The Holy Things are for the holy". It is as if he is saying here is the Bread of Life, Who you see. So, make haste in order to partake of Him; but not all of you, only those who are holy. For only the holy are allowed the Holy Gifts.

By holy he does not only mean those who have reached perfection in virtue, but also those who force themselves (are hastening) and insist on reaching this kind of perfection, but still have not managed to reach it yet. In addition, those who fight are also holy. For nothing stands in their way for them to be sanctified by partaking of the Holy Mysteries".[2] (And this is very comforting for all of us).

For Saint John Chrysostom calls "holy" all those Christians who insist in making the effort to prepare themselves as best as possible for Holy Communion.

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[1] Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, LGFCA 39,262

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 63,133

There are two religious symbolisms pertaining to this particular Elevation of the Lord's most-immaculate Body that is done with both hands (and per three fingers):

- **First:** The Holy Eucharist is not only a representation of the Sacrifice on the Cross, but also its continuity. The Sacrifice continues until His Second fearful Coming.

What happened in Golgotha then? The Lord was lain down on earth and on the Cross-where, He was nailed. Then they pulled the Cross with ropes, they stood it upright with His most holy Body, and stuck it inside a hole, so that it would stand still. The Elevation of the Lamb in the Divine Liturgy declares the Elevation that took place, then where the Celebrant Priest slightly and in a reverent manner elevates over the holy Diskos the Holy Bread, the Lamb of God, "Who takest away the sins of the world". Nevertheless, the Lord spoke symbolically about that Elevation along with the Cross, saying, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw ALL MEN unto me".[1]

- **Second:** The Lord before us with His Body and Blood not on the Cross, but inside the Tomb…

With the priest's Elevation, **"Let us attend. The Holy Things are for the holy"**, according to this symbolism, Christ's soul is being raised from Hades, carrying along and releasing a multitude of Righteous - men and women - who are being united with the theandric Body - Which did not go through decay - and thus the Lord's Resurrection from the dead is realized. Therefore, the Elevation symbolizes the soul's exodus from Hades, its union with the Body, which was inside the Tomb, as well as the whole-bodied and theanthropic Resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ.[2]

The Celebrant declares, "with a loud voice and an awesome cry": **"The Holy Things are for the holy"**, which means that: "If someone is not worthy, prepared and holy, let him not draw near. In addition, since the only One Who is Holy, the only One Who is Righteous, the only One Who is True and the only One Who is Without Sin of all people is only the Lord, this is why our Church through its holy chanters responds to the previous exclamation as follows:

♦ "ONE IS HOLY, ONE IS LORD, JESUS CHRIST, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER. AMEN".

All of us Celebrant priests, who surround the most holy Sanctuary, all of you, who draw near the Beautiful Gate of the Holy Altar, in order to re-

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[1] *Jn.* 12,32

[2] Paraskevopoulos Yervasios, Arch., *Interpretive Overview*..., ibid, p.238

ceive Holy Communion, and you, who stand timid, for you do not receive Holy Communion, you and us, all of us belong to "all". Who have been drawn, who have received the spiritual call by our Lord on the Cross. He has drawn us near Him, so that we may become One Body with Him. In this way through Holy Communion, not only does He nourish us with life-bearing, immortal nourishment, but He also assimilates us with Himself and transfigures us! That is to say, as we draw near the Holy Cup, in order to partake of the divine Nourishment, we must hope in a noetic elevation, which together with His supernatural union will draw us, pull us, and co elevate us to His Kingdom's most heavenly throne!

Through the Celebrant priest's symbolic act, the Lord is present, elevated on the Cross telling us: I have drawn you towards My god-manliness. I have loved you to the point of sacrifice and death, "even the death of the Cross".[1] I have yearned for My union with you. I have desired to eat with you the Passover that brings salvation. I have offered you My Body and My Blood "for the food and drink of the faithful".

Thus, I ask you:

- Do you, by any chance, also have the same yearning for Me?
- Do you draw near the most holy Mystery as the deer pants for the water brooks?
- Do you take heed of my exhortation: **"The Holy Things are for the holy"**? If not, how much you cause Me grief! How much you hurt Me! How much! ...

"Let us attend. The Holy Things are for the holy". The Holy Gifts should be given to the holy. According to the Holy Scripture, Christians were called "holy" in the past. Gradually, this term referred only to the chosen. That is, to those who were tortured even to death or to those who confessed Him through persecutions, imprisonment, and exile or to those who dedicated their whole life to worshipping our Holy God.Thus, the three orders of Christian Saints were the Martyrs, the Confessors, and the Saints.

In any case, holy is every faithful Christian who strives by separating himself from sin, whose soul does "not have spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing"[2] caused by wickedness. However, let us not forget that all humans, with no exception, are sinful. The only One Who is without sin, offered Himself as Sacrifice on the Cross. Through this acceptable Sacrifice, the entire human race was forgiven. All peoples' sins, from Adam's and even to the last human being, who will be born prior to Christ's Second Coming, are forgiven and blotted out.

Nevertheless, when are they forgiven and blotted out? When humans acknowledge Him as Son of God, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity,

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[1] Phil. 2,8

[2] Eph. 5,27

who was incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ, as God-man Lord, as the One Who "suffered under Pontius Pilate" on the Cross and as the One Who was resurrected from the dead. In addition, when they accept and believe these things with all their heart are baptized and partake of the immaculate Mysteries. At the same time, when they accept the entire dogmatic teaching of our Orthodox faith, then the Blood that Christ shed on the Cross, that which is offered by the Holy Cup every time there is Holy Communion, and which purifies the Christian from every sin, for it is given for "the remission of sins and life ever-lasting".

This small "Pearl" and the drop of Blood, which we partake, purifies us, illuminates us, makes us Christ-like, makes us spirit-bearers, makes us "holy". One drop of Blood is enough to make an endless ocean in which billions of people can bathe and be cleansed if they want it...

177. Father Augustine the Elder, who was an Hesychast, was striving alone, deserted and ascetically in a cell of Philotheou Monastery on Mount Athos. The cell was named after the "Entrance of the Holy Theotokos".

Once, as he himself was narrating, while he was doing prostrations as well as praying with his prayer rope cruciform for one whole night inside his shabby 'kelli' the devil appeared as a dreadful dog, which was hurling fire out of his mouth. The dog rushed at Father Augustine in order to choke him, while the former was howling and saying that his prayers and prayer ropes were burning him. Gerondas Augustine grabbed him threw him on the wall and told him:

- Evil devil, why is that you fight God's creatures with such mania and malice and hardness?

As the devil was furious with shame, he immediately disappeared leaving behind him smoke, dirt and stench.

And Father Augustine continued:

- The devil is very strong, but I -with the help of God- am babatsikos[1] too, I threw him on the wall! Then, however, I started feeling sorry and was conscience - stricken, for having beaten the devil. (Imagine what a delicate soul he had!) I was waiting anxiously for it to dawn, so I could rush to my Spiritual father in order for him to hear my confession, since I had beaten the devil.

When it was daylight I went to Provata, (a half hour walk), found my Spiritual father to whom I confessed what happened during prayer and how I beat the devil. My Spiritual father was very accepting. He did not give me a canon (penance of a spiritual nature), but told me to receive Holy Communion the following morning.

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[1] "Babatsikos" means extremely strong.

I was jumping with joy. Working during the day and staying awake praying all night with prayer ropes and prostrations. At 5 o'clock in the morning, I went to the Divine Liturgy to receive Holy Communion.

When the priest brought the Holy Spoon to my mouth, the Holy Communion was a big piece of Meat and Blood! I kept chewing It and chewing It... in order to swallow It...

O that was such great joy! There was such inconceivable gladness in my soul to the point that I could not take It anymore. Sweet tears ran down my cheeks. My heart and body were vibrating with inexpressible happiness while my head lit like a lamp! I left in a rush for I did not wish to be seen by the fathers, I did not wish them to see the divine transformations, which I had undergone unworthily by God!

He revealed all this to father Paisios, the well-known ascetic monk from Mount Athos.[1]

The reason why the Lord determined that the Divine Liturgy be ministered was not only in order to partake of His Holy Body and His most immaculate Blood but also to unite with Him. **Saint Chrysostom** says on this matter: "It is necessary for us first, to learn all about the Miracle of Mysteries, the Holy Eucharist that is, for It was given by Christ to us, and second, how we benefit from It when we partake of It. For, As the Apostle Paul says, we become of one body with Christ and His Body parts from His Flesh and bones. This is accomplished with the nourishment that He has offered to us, that is, with Holy Communion. This is why He got involved and became of one body with us, so that we may be of one with Him, like the head is attached to the body...

The reason behind the ministering of the thanksgiving Mystical Supper is so that we may participate in It, in other words in the Lord's Table. Nevertheless, many faithful rarely participate while others draw near without having prepared themselves properly. Saint Chrysostom condemns in a most austere way, a custom that Christians have even nowadays: to receive Holy Communion only during great feast days, regardless of whether they are prepared or not.

...I see many, the Saint says, partaking of Christ's holy Body simply as it comes, probably out of habit and obligation for the feast day, rather than out of serious thinking and sense. They say, we commune when the time comes for Great Lent, Pascha or Christmas, and it is more than enough for us. If your soul is not pure, you should not draw near the Holy Gifts even though it is Pascha and Christmas. Therefore, when you are clean from desi-

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[1] Paisios, the Elder Hagiorite, *Hagiorite Fathers...*, ibid, p.77-78

res of the flesh and falls, from bearing malice and enmity, you should THEN draw near. Otherwise you should NOT draw near..."[1]

This is why I ask all of you not to draw near the divine Mysteries unprepared as you already are and because the feast day obliges you to. When however, you decide to receive Holy Communion, you should first cleanse your soul very well through Holy Confession and a number of days prior to It, you should also fast, exercise self-control, forgive, do charity work, pray a lot, and also increase your spiritual struggle.

178. Staretz Sampson, in a very terse way narrates a shocking incident that a simple Celebrant priest experienced during this exclamation: as a certain monk priest was serving the liturgy, he mentions, during the exclamation, "The Holy Things are for the holy", an extremely marvelous flame jumped up from the Holy Cup. The flame did not descend from heaven. It jumped up! This happened during our wicked days, during the age of apostacy.[1]

"The Holy Altar is filled with spiritual fire," **Holy Chrysostom** shouts "and as the springs gush forth-natural water, similarly this sends out a certain inexpressible flame. So, do not draw near It holding reeds or leaves or grass (one's sins, in other words) so that you may not burn your soul to the ground, your soul which partakes of the immaculate Mysteries in an unworthy manner. However, draw near holding the precious stones of faith, hope and love. You must keep hold of patience that is made of gold and forgiveness as well as the pearls of fasting, vigilance, and prayer, so that you may purify your soul even more and thus leave the Church, after having taken psychosomatically with you the heavenly goods of divine joy.

...Many are those who partake of the immaculate Mysteries once a year, while others twice and others many times. Whom shall we accept? Neither those who partake of Holy Communion once a year, nor those who partake of It many times, nor those who partake of It a few times, but those who partake of the immaculate Mysteries with a clean conscience, a clean heart and impeccable life. All those who are clean, may always draw near the holy Cup, whereas those who are unclean may not draw near not even once. For they are given their own condemnation and disapproval and hell and punishment..."

Next, the Saint addresses those who commune once a year, on the night of the Paschal Office. (This unfortunately also happens nowadays, in villa-

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, GCF 13,578

[2] Metropolitan of Nikopolis, Meletios translation of *Staretz Sampson, his life and Teachings*, Preveza 1995[3], p.79

ges especially, where there are not any priest Confessors.) Many believe, he writes, that if they listen to the Paschal Homily at the end "You that have fasted and you that have disregarded the fast..."as well as the part which says "..,let no one go forth hungry", can freely receive Holy Communion even without Confession, thinking in fact that they will not bear their judgment. This is a big mistake!

The Golden-tongued Saint says the following about the exclamation "the Holy Things are for the holy": "All of us - clergy and laity - should have good souls, a heart that is totally pure, an understanding that is illuminated and a countenance that should shine with Divine Grace...Whoever is like this, may draw near and may touch the Royal Cup the Celebrant is holding... So, let no one who is sinful draw near; perhaps I should not say no one who is sinful, for it is I who should first be pushed away from the Holy Altar Table, but rather say: let no one who remains sinful and unrepentant draw near".[1]

179. The book entitled The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (Gerondikon) mentions that when Father Eulogios, a great hermit priest, used to serve the liturgy he received such Grace of knowledge and discernment that he was able to understand the condition of each person's soul just by looking at them.

As soon as someone, who was not clean, came near him, he would immediately rebuke him severely, there in front of the Beautiful Gate and say:

- How do you dare draw near the holy Mysteries with such a filthy, cruel and unrepentant heart? You must leave this instant and go cry for your sins, repent, forgive and be forgiven and then you can receive Holy Communion...

If you are not cleansed with holy Confession, Holy Communion will turn into fire that will burn you.

That is what the holy Priest Father Eulogios used to say.[2]

Holy Communion is spiritual "bread" that each one of us ought to consume for himself personally. It is "an everlasting drink" and "the living water" that each one of us shall drink personally. This divine sweet-smelling fragrance he shall smell personally. Holy Communion can bring about, if we are more than ready, the good and divine transformation, which will have a valuable influence to the members of our family and one day to our neighbor.

Only I know and understand what goes on when a day has gone by without prayer. When two days go by without prayer, my home is the one that

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F. 19,486

[2] Gregory Hieromonk, *Church Attendance*, Athens 1991, p.83

realizes it (for it sees and senses my behavior). When three days go by without prayer, the whole world knows it! This is also the case with Holy Communion. If we are worthy partakers of It, we shall be the first ones to notice it. We will experience it in a spiritual way within us. We will sense the Presence, the Energy, Power, and the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

The gifts are wealthy for us all. Moreover, these transformations will cause transformation to our neighbor. This is what we lack: personal transformation! This is why we never change and never follow the straight path, as individuals and as families and as society and as a nation. We do not have living experiences. We do not become one with the Saints, who fill the Church, and one with the Angels who watch over and protect us from being harmed.

These reasons have been accepted first by the writer of this book, for he is being taught twice and woe to him if it is all theory and no practice. Man labors, yet God increases!

180. A certain monk named Ierotheos, of the Holy Monastery of Saint Dionysius on Mount Athos, wanted to do a three-day fast during Cheesefare week, with absolute fasting and also wished to double his canon. He spent the whole night praying, doing prostrations, also praying with the prayer rope, and studying while during the day he had a lot of work and heavy deeds to do.

On the third night, around midnight, while he was praying he suddenly saw his small 'kelli' being filled with Light. A widespread Light... No lamps, no candles, no electricity, but the whole sun, we could say, with a totally pure white Light filled his cell and he was under the impression that it was coming from an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia), which he revered greatly.

As Father Ierotheos was narrating the story, he was asked:

- When you saw the Light, were you upset or frightened? Did you cower?

- No, I did not, he responded. I was not frightened at all. On the contrary, I was very peaceful. I felt an inexplicable joy, peace and stillness of thoughts (no thoughts whatsoever). There was total silence. I felt such happiness... that without realizing it I started whispering the Salutations to the All-Holy Theotokos (Panagia), the Small and Great Supplication Services...as many Megalynarion (hymns of magnification to the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia) as I could remember. Moreover, I chanted, "It is truly meet..." many times, and the hymn "O Theotokos and Virgin...", "Awed by the Beauty of thy Virginity..." as well as other hymns dedicated to the Most Holy Theotokos (Panagia). I chanted them with great joy and pleasure! I was so happy that for a minute I thought I was flying! ...

When the brothers heard it for the first time, they were surprised and glorified the Lord Savior's and His Most Holy (Panagia) and Most

Immaculate Mother's consent and tenderheartedness, who so much comfort their faithful and obedient children, as humble and insignificant as they may be. The extreme condescension and divine tenderheartedness chooses with great leniency "the poor in spirit", that is to say the ones who are humble and "pure in heart", so that it may rest upon and be glorified through them.

The brothers asked Father Ierotheos a number of times:

- How long did this excessively wonderful experience last?

- Three to four hours...he responded.

It was a Miracle of Miracles! An extremely humble monk was literally immersed in radiant, uncreated and triune Light. Certainly, if there were eyes to see, they would also see the monk's countenance reflecting the divine Light, in Which he was being immersed... It was indeed an overflow of Light of inexpressible radiance!...[1]

181. A certain Priest once told me that while his Celebrant Gerondas was saying aloud, "Let us attend." "The Holy Things are for the holy", and simultaneous to the breaking of the Lamb his countenance started transforming... beaming, taking the shape of a bright angel, of someone at a very young age... The concelebrant who was watching this incident for some time was startled, as he was not able to move and in a state of amazement... What was he to admire first? Was it the awesome Mysteries that were being ministered or his Geronda's countenance that was one minute like lightning and the next like a bright cloud?[2]

182. I also heard something similar being stated by eyewitnesses about Father George Karslidis, when he used to serve the liturgy.

Once during Pascha, following the Consecration of the Precious Gifts and after the commemorations, while he was saying "and the mercies of our Great God..." he turned towards the congregation in

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[1] Lazarus monk of the Monastery of Saint Dionysius, *Narrations from the Monastery of Saint Dionysius*, Holy Monastery of Dionysius, Mount Athos 1989[2], p.47-48

[2] Personal notes

order to bless it. His countenance was as bright as the sun and his right hand was radiating beams of divine Light and divine blessings.

In fact, one woman was bold enough to tell him:

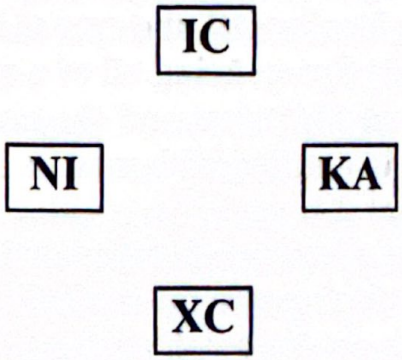
- Father, you have no idea what light had overshadowed you! You were as bright as the sun!

Father Karslidis answered:

- My child, am I worthy to be immersed light? During the Divine Liturgy, Christ and the Saints were present by means of that divine Light. His brightness shone on me as if I were a mirror and from the mirror It reflected on to you. A blurred and broken mirror... this is what I really am![1]

Following the words, **"One is Holy, One is Lord..."**, the holy chanters chant the **Koinonikon** of the day (psalm verses chanted at the Divine Liturgy during the communion of the clergy) and next they read the third part of the Service of Preparation for Holy Communion.

However, what takes place inside the Holy Altar? After the exclamation, "Let us attend. The Holy Things are for the holy", as the Lamb of God is being elevated, It is being cut into pieces and divided into four parts: **IC-XC-NI-KA** each portion is also sealed with two letters and the pieces of the Lamb are arranged on the rim of the Holy Diskos in the form of a cross, thusly:



During the cutting and dividing, the priest with great reverence and care says: **"Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided, yet not disunited; who is ever eaten, yet never consumed, but sanctifieth those who partake thereof"**.

This cutting into pieces is also done for practical reasons - in this way, the Celebrant priests and Christians can receive Holy Communion more easily.

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[1] Personal notes

This is also what Jesus Christ did during the Mystical Supper: "Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake (cut) it, and gave to them"[1] to His Disciples that is. Everyone receives Holy Communion from the same Lamb. It is the life-bearing Nourishment.

From Great and Holy Thursday's Mystical Supper where Christ granted His Disciples the great Mystery of Holy Eucharist, until the end of the world, the broken Bread-Lamb is imparted as nourishment for deification and immortality to all those baptized faithful Christians "for the remission of sins and life everlasting". It is necessary to cut It first into four parts and then into many very small portions so that everyone may be communed. This was also the reason why during the apostolic years the Holy Eucharist was called **"The Breaking of the Bread"**.

The Precious Bread, the Lamb of God is cut into very many small pieces. However, it is not cut into many pieces of bread, nor is the Lord's Body amputated and divided, so that we may be under the impression that one person eats one piece of His Body and the other eats another piece and the third person another piece. No! We cut It into small pieces so that all Christians may partake of one portion. Everyone partakes, no matter how small the portion may be, the Same Precious Bread, the Lamb of God, the Body of the Lord. The entire Body and not part of It. This is why we say, **"divided"** - cut and **"distributed"**- cut into small portions.

183. A person's soul was wondering whether that which each one communes, the small or the big Pearl, more or less, is Christ as a whole or not. One Sunday morning when he was getting ready to receive Holy Communion, in his noetic faculty with the eyes of his soul he could see the Divine Pearl in the holy Spoon being all of a sudden changed into Christ as a Whole. Between the priest and the person who was being communed, Christ was being united with man.[2]

Therefore, "**divided** and **distributed is the Lamb of God**" and immediatelly we say: **"who is divided, yet not disunited"**. The Lamb of God is cut into small pieces, yet It is not divided. Even though the portion that each faithful communes may be small, nevertheless, the whole Precious Bread, the whole Body of the Lord, the ONE and undivided Lamb of God, Who gave His Life on the Precious Cross for the salvation of the whole world, is imparted unto us.

184. Saint Barbaros was a pirate before he got to know Christ, and during their attack against the Acarnians he and his companions were saved, so Barbaros lived in the mountains as a wild animal. He had turned to be the fear and trembling of the area around Acarnia.

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[1] Mark 14,22

[2] Personal notes

One day, Barbaros saw from a distance the priest of the village Trypho, Father John Nikopolitis, entering Saint George's Church in order to serve the Divine Liturgy.

Without wasting any time, he formulated a plan to rob the reverent priest and ultimately murder him. However, he arrived late at Saint George's Church, so the priest had proceeded with the Divine Liturgy.

As Barbaros entered the Church with hostile intentions, he discovered that he was in a supernatural state, in a miracle. He sees the Priest immersed in divine Light, before the Holy Altar Table while his feet were above ground! Two young men, who were also brighter than the sun, were holding the priest on each side while they had lifted him up in the air, up to two measures of length above ground!

All of a sudden, he senses an ineffable out of this world sweet-smelling fragrance gushing out. Angels had surrounded the Holy Altar Table as they were chanting hymns and doxologies to the Lamb of God.

Then, behold! A very graceful Infant appeared! Two Angels who were carrying It brought It and placed It on the Holy Diskos. The Divine Infant's Countenance was radiating divine Light while the Angels were looking at the magnificence that was beyond this world, intently with awe and fascination!

When the time for the Great Entrance had drawn closer, the Priest approached the Holy Prothesis (Table of Preparation) and took the Precious Gifts in his hands. When the "Holy Gifts" exited the Holy Altar, Barbaros saw Angels holding Father John so that he may not fall and thus desecrate the Holy Gifts. Barbaros observes in a state of terror, he watches in fear all that which is ministered and that which the love of God allows him to see.

The Divine Mystagogy went on. They recited the Symbol of Faith and proceeded to the Consecration of Holy Gifts. After the Celebrant had blessed them, he said, "And make this bread the Precious Body of Thy Christ... and that which is in this Cup, the Precious Blood of Thy Christ... changing (them) by Thy Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen". Then Barbaros sees the Celebrant priest taking a knife in order to slaughter the Divine Infant. He poured His Blood inside the Holy Cup, while he cut His Body and placed It in the Holy DIskos.

Following Holy Communion, when the priest elevated the Holy Things facing the people and said "Always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages...", it seemed as if the roof of the Church was torn in half. The Angels lifted the Divine Infant from there into the heavens with hymns and doxologies, as they had done as they Were bringing Him down, while a wonderful sweet-smelling fragrance and lightning gushed forth in the interior of the Church.

Barbaros could not stand looking at this incredible miracle. He was touched and thus his heart softened. His wild instincts subsided. The pu-

re light of divine knowledge illuminated his understanding. The Grace of the Holy Spirit overshadowed him and raised him from spiritual callousness. He became a Christian because of one and only Divine Liturgy.

As soon as the Divine Liturgy was complete, in a state of awe and humility he came near and fell on his knees in front of the Celebrant of God. Sobbing, he confessed before him the miracle that he was deemed worthy to witness. Simultaneously, he confessed his sinful past and submitted himself totally to Christ.[1]

What a mystery! It was an awesome Mystery, indeed! "Great is the mystery of godliness", the Holy Scripture also cries. "God was manifest in the flesh… believed on in the world"[2] "divided, yet not disunited". Let us not wish to seek and explain these heavenly realities with our poor, finite and sinful understanding. Even though the world of heaven, the region of the uncreated, triune God that is to say, is incorrupt, never-changing, everlasting, beyond time and divine, nevertheless, through the grace, the working and the power of the Holy Spirit, it is granted to all of us through the Mystery of Divine Worship. The entire work of the incarnate divine Dispensation, from the time of creation up to Christ's Second Coming, the righteous Judgment and the everlasting gifts to come, are marvelously present in the Divine Liturgy. How this happens can neither be interpreted nor explained in human terms.

John the Evangelist testifies the following: It is Great and Holy Friday evening, around three o'clock. The Lord on the Cross is hemorrhaging. After the Lord cried out in a loud voice "he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the spirit".[3] Moreover, since the Sabbath was breaking and it was a high day (Passover was breaking), they hastened the Unnailing and Burial. The soldiers came and started breaking the legs of the thieves who were crucified with Jesus Christ, so that they would die faster.

Then, they came before Christ and seeing that he was already dead, they did not break His legs. In these exact words: "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they break not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water". In other words, the symbols of the two great Mysteries of our salvation: the water for Baptism and the Blood for the Holy Eucharist, "… that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken"[4] What does this fact that His most holy legs and bones were not broken tell us? It tells us that the Lord's Body cannot be disunited, cut and amputated.

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[1] Danas, Paul, Arch., *The Barbarian who became a Saint*, Vonitsa 2000, p.20

[2] I Tim. 3,16 [3] Jn. 19,30 [4] Jn. 19,36

In this way, now the Precious Bread, the Body of the Lord, the Lamb of God, is not disunited; He is **"divided, yet not disunited"**. The dead Body of the Lord even inside the Tomb is united with Divinity and is, neither dissolved nor decayed after He dies as a human being. Therefore, the Lord's Body is disunited and unbreakable even on the Cross and inside the Tomb as well as inside the holy Cup.

Thus, the Elevation, according to the Fathers, signifies the Lord's life-bearing Sacrifice, and the dividing of the Bread signifies His Slaughter.

After the words, **"divided, yet not disunited"**, follow the words: **"ever eaten, yet never consumed, but he sanctifieth those who partake thereof"**.

How many millions of million Christians have partaken of the Lord's Immaculate Body and Precious Blood, indeed! Holy Communion fed myriads, from the time of the first Mystical Supper up to this day! Not by receiving a few crumbs from the Bread of Life, but the completely "disunited" and "never consumed" Lamb of God for each one. This does not happen only once in each person's life, but hundreds and thousands of times starting from the moment they are being Baptized up to the moment they depart. In addition, during times of Persecution Christians, who were prospective Martyrs and Confessors, used to receive Holy Communion every day or four times a week.

"Ever eaten, yet never consumed".

It is an awesome, unintelligible, inconceivable, inexplicable Mystery! All the uncreated workings of the Holy Spirit through all the Mysteries, prayer and the Holy Scriptures, especially in Divine Worship, are all-heavenly indeed and most inconceivable for our finite understanding.

Even, just by being under the Grace and working of the Holy Spirit, the holy Celebrants of the Most High, who are righteous and blameless, experienced some manifestations of light of the uncreated triune Divinity and that of the heavenly Altar in the Divine Liturgy! This is why, even though the many stories that we have mentioned from time to time are not occurrences that happen every day, yet they occur in the life of the Celebrant Priest as well as in the life of of the faithful Church-going Christians more scarcely still by Grace

These exceptional great gifts are granted prior to or after great temptations and a great amount of pain and sorrow.

We all commune and partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord. This Body and Blood were, are and will be in the ages to come united with the infinite, absolute, and never constrained DIVINITY. How then can the Holy Bread of the immortal, divine and everlasting Life not be unconsumed and never-ending?

185. Many years ago, a priest was telling me that one Saturday he did not wish to serve the liturgy due to heavy winter. The temperature

was 10 degrees below zero. He and the chanter would only be present.

He had no idea about our Church's teachings on the presence neither of the Triumphant Church nor about how the Divine Liturgy benefits the living and the departed enormously.

With difficulty, he forced himself to go to Church, wishing that the chanter would not come so that he could avoid serving the liturgy...The chanter came however.

He did the Prothesis in a hurry and started the Divine Liturgy. Shortly after, Bishops, Priests, Monks and Nuns as well as other faithful turned up. Most of them sat on the right and on the left side of the Chanter's Stands and commenced chanting so beautifully, heavenly that he forgot how cold, and lonely he was... His whole being was heated up... His whole existence was all a flame...

He did the Small Entrance and saw that the Church was full of people. Most of them seemed familiar... He did not pay attention but went on with the Divine Liturgy.

It was time for the Consecration of the Holy Gifts. He then saw three Archpriests, brightly clothed and radiant entering the Holy Altar. They knelt with him and prayed... He got up very carefully and in fear, took the censer and in a loud voice said:"Especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate, Most Blessed and Glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary..." The soul of the Priest who was amazed, filled with divine joy. Peace and heavenly stillness hesychia dominated his inner self.

Then, the moment of the Elevation and the Dividing of the Lamb of God had come. Sweetest melodies filled the whole Church... The whole multitude of people who were present, along with the Monks, Priests and Bishops chanted not only once, but many times "One is Holy, One is Lord; Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen". Next, they chanted the Koinonikon: "Taste and see that the Lord is good. Alleluia".

The Priest was wondering what to do. Should he be the first one to commune or step aside for the three Archpriests who were present? One of them nodded to him to receive Holy Communion and then gave him a sign to Unify and Place the remaining portions of the Lamb into the Cup, as well as other portions in memory of the Holy Theotokos and the Saints.

Finally, he opened the Beautiful Gate...and saw no one...he looked inside the Holy Altar to the right and left... the Archpriests had disappeared... He remained fixed and amazed for a few minutes.

- "With fear of God and faith and love, draw near...," he said and the chanter drew near.

He is still amazed! He is still wondering! The whole Triumphant Church was present. His departed brothers Archpriests, Priests, monks, men, women and children were those whom he commemorated from

time to time, this is why some of them seemed familiar. The Archrpiests in the Holy Altar were the three Hierarchs: Saint Chrysostom, Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory the Theologian.

His lengthy university studies, his research and all the sleepless nights he spent studying, were not able to give him not even one drop of sweetness and divine knowledge, something that a one and only Divine Liturgy succeeded in doing...[1]

God's judgment is an abyss. An abyss beyond conception is the Mystery of the Divine Liturgy in which we participate so frequently. The faithful Christian experiences it but is unable to comprehend it. He experiences it with his heart and soul. He experiences it in a supernatural way within himself. He does not experience it through his senses, in a visible way or through his secular knowledge. No! It is a Spiritual experience only! This is why we call it a Mystery! It is an awesome Mystery, unintelligible and inexplicable!

According to **Saint John Chrysostom**, "Jesus Christ's offer and Sacrifice is "unconsumed", that is to say it is not consumed and thus never runs out! Jesus Christ's immaculate Body, the One he received from the Virgin Mary, is incorrupt and unconsumed. Although the BREAD - LAMB is cut and eaten, yet Jesus Christ remains whole."[2]

In order for the Church Fathers to represent this notion in a perceptible way, they thought of using the mirror and sound as an example. When a mirror breaks into a thousand pieces in each piece you are able to see all of your face likewise, the sound stays intact and whole, even if thousands of ears are listening to it.

"One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen".

No one becomes holy on one's own, or by following the commandments, or by cultivating the virtues and one's good deeds, but we are sanctified by God Man the Lord Who is the only One who is Holy.

The Fathers of the Church tell us that: If we place one thousand mirrors under the sun, all of them will both be flashing and radiant and all of them will be beaming rays. In this way, we will be under the impression that there are one thousand suns. In reality, however, there is only one. Thus, the only One Who is Holy, the Lord our God, as another Sun, which sheds its rays to the faithful, can be seen through many souls many of which are proclaimed saints. However, there is One and Only true Holy One: the Lord.

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Holy Metropolis of Serbia and Kozanis, *The Divine Liturgy, a treatise for edification...*, ibid, p.394-395

The Lamb of God is divided, but not disunited. Every portion is Christ as a whole. Those among us who commune as we have drawn near the holy Cup, we all receive Christ as a whole, Who fulfils our whole being and makes us gods by Grace without leaving any part of our body void from His divine Presence. This is why, man is dematerialized, this why he receives warmth, this is why he is filled with a divine flame and is ready to cast himself even into fire for the glory of God ...

- Christ is entirely within us.
- He is entirely within each one of us who has received Holy Communion.
- He is entirely within all Christians who commune.
- He is entirely inside all Orthodox Altars on earth.
- He is also entirely in the Heavens.
- He is entirely throughout all creation, visible and invisible.

It is a Mystery! This is what our Orthodoxy is! This is what our faith is!

As soon as the priest says, **"The Holy Things are for the holy"**, he moves in three different ways:

- **First**, he elevates the Lamb cruciform.
- **Second**, he divides Him into four parts and arranges the pieces of the Lamb on the rim of the holy Diskos
- and **third**, he takes the portion sealed IC (Jesus, that is) and places It in the holy Cup, thus realizing the **UNION** of the Precious Body with the Holy Blood.

186. Once, in a certain Russian monastery, as Staretz Sampson tells us, during the Divine Liturgy, a monk remembered that he was told to sweep the entrance of the Monastery's Katholikon very well.

"I might as well do it now, he thought, since this part of the Divine Liturgy is not as important".

Therefore, the monk took the broom and started sweeping. He was saying the Jesus' Prayer silently and in a noetic way, and from time to time, he would watch that which was being served...

Not even five minutes had gone by when he turned to look up to see the domes of the Church (like the ones in Russia) suddenly opening and the Triumphant Church appearing with all its majesty before him! It was an awesome sight!

In the center, there was a Holy Table as big as the sky. In front of it, three Archpriests were on their knees. Others... and others surrounded them... And a multitude of Priests and Deacons surrounded the

former. On the right and left sides Angelic choirs were standing in indescribable and glistening beauty. There was inexpressible glory and light... Moreover, the thousands of honey-flowing, inconceivable melodies of the heavenly Commanders who were present filled him with divine Blessedness and joy...

A heavenly Divine Worship was being ministered! Nevertheless, it was being ministered in a strange way, which resembled the Divine Liturgy on earth. It was ministered by Holy Hierarchs, such as, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint John Chrysostom (three). Like, Saint Athanasius the Great, Saint Photius the Great and Saint Gregory Palamas (three). Alternatively, like Saint Nicholas, Saint Spyridon and Saint Nektarios (three).

Yet there, in the heavenly Triumphant Church of Jerusalem Above, they received Holy Communion. He saw that they were partaking, in a never-ending way, of the glory and the uncreated triune Light, of the "ambrosia" of divine Blessedness, of the Cup of God's ineffable Mysteries...

The monk remained motionless, rooted to the spot until the Divine Liturgy had been completed... When the monks exited the Church, they saw another monk who was standing still. He was also rooted to the spot and in floods of tears... Not only was he wet inside out but also his cloak was soaking from the floods of tears.

Very carefully, they took hold of him and without saying a word they brought him very gently to his cell where he remained for a long time in a state of total amazement. Divine revelation had overwhelmed him.

When he got over it, his Spiritual father also arrived. The latter brought him round from all the tearing he went through and then they went together to the Abbott of the Monastery to whom they narrated the monk's exceptional divine vision with a sense of awe and extreme humbleness.[1]

♦ "THE FULNESS (OF THE CUP OF FAITH) OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN".

The meaning of these words is related to the Holy Spirit.

God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who suffered, was crucified, was buried, was raised from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven so that the Holy Spirit may descend to earth. Without the Lord's

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[1] Metropolitan of Nikopolis, Meletios translation *Staretz Sampson*..., ibid, p.76

Sacrifice on the Cross, His Death and Resurrection as well as His Ascension, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit would never come. He, who really believes in Christ, not only in word but also in deed, senses and experiences it. By partaking of the immaculate Mysteries, the Holy Spirit or His most blameless uncreated Energy becomes a living feeling within him. Nevertheless, it is difficult for the ungodly person to understand not only the Divine Liturgy but all the matters of the faith as well.

By Uniting the Body and Blood in the holy Cup, the unity of Jesus Christ's two natures is proclaimed: perfect God and perfect man into an undivided entity in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is a union between the Sacrifice on the Cross and Divine Grace, which is offered to the faithful through Holy Communion.

Christ fills us with the Holy Spirit. What is the outcome of Christ's Passions, of His words and works? **Saint Nicholas Cabasilas** asks. Nothing other than receiving of the Holy Spirit, he answers. Nevertheless, this means salvation, immortality and a Heavenly Kingdom.[1]

When the celebrant Unites the Body and Blood of Christ, he is given some very hot water, in a small ladle or pitcher called **Zeon**. The deacon (if there is one) says, **"Bless, master, the Zeon"**. The priest blesses the hot water and says, **"Blessed is the fervor of Thy Holy Things, O Lord, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen"**. Then, he pours warm water into the Holy Cup cross-wise and says, **"The warmth (of faith, full) of the Holy Spirit. Amen"**. **"Blessed is the warmth of Thy Holy Things"**, in other words blessed is the fervent faith of God's Saints, that of Christians.

Why hot water? According to the Gospels, shortly before the Unnailing, a soldier with his spear pierced our Christ's Sacred Side "and forthwith came there out blood and water".[2] Furthermore, although the Lord's most holy Body was already dead, nevertheless, from His pierced Side there was a flow of Blood and Water. According to the Fathers this means that, they (Blood and Water) were warm, in other words, living not dead (for if they were frozen, they would not flow). It was as if His holy Side at that moment was alive and life bearing. Indeed It was, for It was united in essence with the life bearing Divinity. We do not comprehend it, but this is how it is. Although the Lord's most undefiled Body was dead, yet His sacred Side from which "came there out blood and water" was life bearing.

In order to remember the Miracle of His life giving Side, we pour very hot, boiling water; it must be hot. (This is what 'zeon' means: very hot, boiling

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,428B

[2] Jn. 19,34

water.) The water is so hot that the holy Cup receives its warmth. The Precious Gifts for Holy Communion should be offered warm. In addition, when the priests and Christians receive Holy Communion, they should feel that they are partaking of Christ's Living Body and Blood.

As the Celebrant Unites the Holy Body with the Blood, he said: **"The fullness... of the Holy Spirit"**. As he pours the zeon into the holy Cup, he says, **"The warmth... of the Holy Spirit"**. Everything underlines the presence and the descent of the Comforter.

"Since this (hot) water, **Saint Nicholas Cabasilas** writes, is water and has in itself fire (due to the boiling factor), it reveals the Holy Spirit That is also called "water" and appeared as fire that "sat upon each of" Christ's Disciples during Pentecost."[1]

♦ THE SERVICE OF PREPARATION FOR HOLY COMMUNION

After all that proceeded, it is time for Holy Communion, after we have already read the third part of **The Service of Preparation for Holy Communion**. Parenthetically, this canon consists of three parts:

- **The first part** includes the Canon with every letter of the Alphabet as the acrostic and is read together with the Small Compline.
- **The second part** consists of three Psalms, three troparions and nine Prayers. It is actually read in the morning. However, our Christians nowadays read the first and second parts the previous night, as long as it is read it is fine.
- **The third part** of the Service is read in the Holy Altar by the priests during the Koinonikon, yet it must be read by the holy chanters as well. In this way, both clergy and laity prepare themselves for Holy Communion.

♦ The **first Prayer** for Holy Communion says the following:

"I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who didst come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am first. And I believe that this is truly

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,452A,B

Thine own immaculate Body and that this is truly Thine own precious Blood. Wherefore, I pray Thee, have mercy on me, and pardon my transgressions both voluntary and involuntary, of word and of deed, of knowledge and of ignorance; and make me worthy to partake without condemnation of Thine immaculate mysteries unto forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting. Amen".

This is a confession of faith and of hope in our love for Christ: "I believe, O Lord, and I confess that thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God, who didst come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am first." This particular phrase is based on Apostle Paul's sermons "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting".[1] This is why I received mercy, says the Apostle Paul, so that Christ may reveal to me, the greatest sinner, all of His forbearance and love.

Holy Chrysostom tells us that no one should fall into despair when thinking about his salvation: Let us say that there is a city with many people, whose citizens are practicing evil, are wicked, perverted, others more, others less; someone among the majority has done all sorts of evil. If therefore, someone says that the king wishes to forgive all of them, the others do not believe this until they see that the most evil of all has been forgiven. Then no one is in doubt anymore. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul says: Since God wishes to assure that all of his peoples' transgressions are forgiven, He forgave the one who had committed the most sins. "Let no one have doubts about his salvation, for I, the first among sinners, was saved."[2]

Staretz Sampson narrates the following incident from his life:

187. "The Most Reverend Stephen was serving the Divine Liturgy in the Church of the Holy Cross, in Saint Alexander Nefsky's 'Lavra' (large or famous monastery). I was then a hierodeacon and was holding the holy Cup. The bishop read the Prayer "I believe, O Lord, and I confess...", and later on, he lifted the holy Cup's ('kalima'), cover in order to commune the faithful. That was when he was dumbfounded. He saw human Meat and Blood inside! He turned to me and said:

-Father, can you see?

"What are we to do? He turned left, I turned right with the holy Cup and entered the Holy Altar. He placed the holy Cup on the Holy Altar Table and fell on his knees. He was praying that the Lord would

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[1] I Tim. 1, 15-16

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G 62,522

show mercy! How were we to impart human flesh? Who would partake of It? He was praying for approximately fifteen minutes with his hands elevated. Afterwards he looked inside the holy Cup once again. It had turned back into Bread and Wine. Thus, he came out and communed the faithful".[1]

When each one of us draws near the holy Cup, they are "the first among sinners"and ought to acknowledge it.

◆ The **second Prayer** says:

"Behold, I approach Divine Communion;O Maker, burn me not as I partake, For Fire art Thou which burneth the unworthy. But purify Thou me of every stain".

With this Prayer, we ask the Lord our maker, not to burn us with the coal of Holy Communion, as is the case with those who are unworthy, but to cleanse us from every sinful stain.

◆ The **third Prayer** is:

"Of Thy mystic Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of Thy mystery to Thine enemies, neither will I give Thee a kiss as did Judas; but like the thief will I confess Thee: Remember me, O Lord, in Thy kingdom".

Here we ask the Son of God, Christ, to receive us at His Mystical Supper, so that we may partake of His Precious Body and Blood, as we promise Him that we shall never reveal this Mystery to neither His enemies, nor to Himself with a kiss, like Judas did, but like the thief we shall confess, believing that we are sinners. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom".[2]

We never reveal this Mystery. It is a Mystery indeed. It is the most royal of all Mysteries. It is something beyond the joy of Angels, something grea-

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[1] Metropolitan of Nikopolis, Meletios, translation *Staretz Sampson*..., ibid, p.91

[2] Luk. 23,42

ter, unsurpassed by the beauty of Paradise. This Mystery, this secret is not to be revealed to others. For it belongs to God.

◆ The **fourth Prayer**:

"Tremble, O man, as thou beholdest the deifying Blood, for It is a burning coal consuming the unworthy. The Body of God both deifieth and nourisheth me; Deifieth the spirit and wondrously nourisheth the mind".

This Prayer tells us: Tremble, man seeing divine Blood before you, for do not forget that this is burning coal, which burns those who are unworthy. Indeed, the Body of God both deifies and nourishes us. God's Spirit both nourishes our understanding in a wondrous, strange and inconceivable way.

◆ The **fifth Prayer:**

"Thou hast smitten me with yearning, O Christ, and by Thy divine love hast Thou changed me. But with Thine immaterial fire, consume my sins and count me worthy to be filled with delight in Thee, that leaping for joy, O Good One, I may magnify Thy two comings".

Here with this Prayer we say to the Lord: "Christ, You have enchanted me with Your yearning and You have transformed my whole life with Your divine love. For this reason, may You burn my sins with Your divine, intangible fire and make me worthy of fulfilling me with Your spiritual enjoyment, so that I may magnify, Merciful One, as I leap with joy, both Your comings: the current One and the One that is to come."

◆ The **sixth Prayer:**

"Into the splendor of Thy Saints how shall I, the unworthy one, enter? For should I dare to enter the bridal chamber, my vesture doth betray me, for it is not a wedding garment; and as one

bound, I shall be cast out by the Angels. Cleanse, O Lord, the defilement of my soul, and save me, since Thou art the Friend of man".

The word for word interpretation of this Prayer is: In the splendid atmosphere of Your Saints, how am I the unworthy one, to enter? For, if I dare enter secretly with them in the bridal chamber, my robe, which is not appropriate, will make me noticeable, and bound the Angels will cast me out. Lord, cleanse my soul from filth and save me by your love for man.

Staretz Sampson tells us the following remarkable incident concerning a certain Celebrant Priest who wished to read the Prayers of Preparation for Holy Communion during the moment when he was partaking of the immaculate Mysteries:

188. I met a priest who wished to learn how to pray with all his heart during these holy moments. Therefore, one day while he was communing and holding the Lord's Body in his right palm he started reading the Prayer, as usual: "I believe, O Lord, and I confess..." When he had completed it and as rivers of tears were running down his cheeks, he started beseeching fervently and modestly: "Lord, teach me how to pray from within the depths of my soul. I just merely read the Prayers. I do not know how to pray at all". All of a sudden, his countenance glowed by a marvelous, supernatural light, as he himself would say, and his understanding was enlightened. He once again began saying "I believe, O Lord, and I confess..." without taking his eyes off the Lord's Most Holy Body.

The deacon noticed it and seeing that he was taking a long time, he approached him and whispered,

- Bishop, hurry up. The people are waiting.

The Koinonikon was complete. There was a gap of silence. He realizes that he should proceed to Holy Communion. NEVERTHELESS, HE IS NOT ABLE TO! No matter how much he tries! No matter how much he wishes to! He stands there dumbfounded as he was rooted to the spot! For not only DID HE REALIZE the true way to pray, but mainly that ALL liturgical Prayers constitute the first and foremost Prayer towards the Lover of Mankind and Most Merciful God. It was as if he was resurrected. As if he had woken up from a strange dream. Since then he has been crying incessantly. And he was never able to turn his look towards Our Lord's most immaculate Body.[1]

[1] Metropolitan of Nikopolis, Meletios translation *Staretz Sampson...*, ibid, p.82

What am I the wretched one to add?

◆ Hence, we should proceed with the **seventh Prayer:**

"O Man-Befriending Master, Lord Jesus Christ my God, let not these holy Gifts be unto me for judgment through mine unworthiness, but for the purification and sanctification of both soul and body, and as an earnest of the life and the kingdom to come. For it is good for me to cleave unto God and to place in the Lord the hope of my salvation".

And the Prayer's interpretation: O Man-Befriending Master, Lord Jesus Christ my God, do not let these Holy Gifts be my condemnation, for I am unworthy, but rather may they purify and sanctify my soul and body and promise me the Life and Kingdom to come. It is good for me to cling on to God and establish my hope of my salvation unto the Lord.

Again: **"Of Thy Mystic Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant..."**

All these Prayers confess: On the one hand, the firm faith and fiery love towards our Lord Jesus Christ and on the other, our weak and sinful state, which make us, tremble with fear before the holy Cup. In addition, these prayers confess the fact that the devil tempts us even during these sacred moments. He tries to agitate us with awful and unclean thoughts, so that he may take away the sense of peacefulness within our souls, bring us into despair and finally make us feel estranged with Holy Communion.

As a Spiritual father, I assure you that the devil numerous times creates problems to several souls by generating such thoughts that ultimately deprive them of Holy Communion. That is to say, their inner self is tormented with shameful, filthy and blasphemous thoughts. Furthermore, although the soul is in all aspects prepared by having already obtained the Spiritual father's consent, nevertheless, as soon as they proceed to receive Holy Communion, they are flooded with these unclean thoughts, they get agitated and eventually, they do not draw near. As this is not enough, if someone does not confess these thoughts as soon as possible, meaning what happens when he enters the Church, for instance, the filthy, dirty, shameful, and blasphemous thoughts he is tormented by, and especially, when this situation occurs during the moment when he draws near to receive Holy Communion, they may drive him crazy. If a great deal of time has gone by before these thoughts are confessed, it is very difficult for the soul to believe and be reinforced so as to be able to despise them in order to draw near Holy Communion without fear! Therefore, be prudent!

When devilish thoughts attack us like birds of prey, just because they want to tear us to pieces with either doubts, or shamefulness and blasphe-

my... They are mere attacks, to which we should pay no attention. These demonic thoughts ought to be ignored and immediate obedience should be made to the Church, which through the Confessor tells us: "Draw near for Holy Communion".

Two women from the Gospel give us lots of courage, hope and boldness. On the one hand, there is the woman who had a flow of blood. She is the one who touched the hem of Christ's garment and the flow of blood that lasted many years stopped. She later became Saint Veronica. While the other is the sinner, who washed away Christ's feet with her tears and constantly kissed them. She is the one who anointed them with myrrh and then sponged them with her hair. These women not only did not burn, but they also received the richness of Divine Grace for the remission of sins and healing.

God is an ocean of love and mercy and His tender-mercies are infinite. If we are weak, He is Almighty. He is Strong in forgiving, Strong in loving, for HE IS Love! Our feelings are somewhat strange during these moments. No matter how much we have prepared ourselves, we are sinful, wretched, deplorable and unworthy. How are we to lift up our eyes and contemplate Christ's divine Bridal Chamber? (By Bridal Chamber, we mean the holy Cup).

If we do not commune on our own, we shall be violating God's commandment that says, "Take, eat..., drink ye all of it..."[1] "he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him".[2] Then again if we wish to commune, we are captivated by fear due to our sinful and filthy state. "And I have no wedding garment that I may enter in Your Bridal Chamber. O Giver of Light, make radiant the vesture of my soul, and save me". Thus, divine fear and yearning and sweet longing must co-exist in the soul of all those who wish to partake of the immaculate Mysteries. They should be characterized by love and divine humility!

After bishops, priests and deacons have received Holy Communion inside the Holy Altar, the Celebrant priest or deacon **"breaks into small pieces the remaining portions of the Lamb sealed NI and KA, placing them in the Cup"**. In other words, he puts the remaining parts of the sacred Bread - Lamb inside the holy Cup while at the same time he says **"In that we have beheld the resurrection of Christ..."**, **"Shine, shine O New Jerusalem..."**, **"How divine! How beloved! How sweet is thy voice..."**, as well as **"O Christ, great and most holy Pascha..."**.

This means that every Divine Liturgy confesses the Resurrection. With Holy Communion, we sense that the Resurrection is being ministered inside our whole being, Christ our Master is resurrected within us, brightly clothed and shining brilliantly with the lighning flashes of immortality and Divinity!

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[1] Mat. 26,26-27

[2] Jn. 6,56 and 54

Divine Communion is "Pascha", that is, a passage from death to life, from slavery to freedom, to salvation, to Christ's Resurrection. We mentioned that every Divine Liturgy confesses the Resurrection, Jesus Christ's Resurrection itself and every time there is Holy Communion we are resurrected personally when we partake of It. After we have received Holy Communion we are in heaven, we have angelic wings. We are Christ bearers, god bearers and spirit-bearers!

The Beautiful Gate and the two doors of the Holy Altar open before the priest exits with the holy Cup saying **"with fear of God and faith and love, draw near"**. Then, those who have been sitting rise. Here the Christian must be able to "catch a glimpse of" the Angels descending from heaven in order to roll away "the stone from the door of the sepulchre".[1] Next, with the holy Cup, we should all be able to see our Lord Who has Risen from the dead and Who also offers Himself "for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting". In this way, all of us gradually and in line... one-by-one..., with extreme fear, with faith, with love draw near Holy Communion. The Communion of the faithful is next.

♦ "WITH FEAR OF GOD AND FAITH AND LOVE, DRAW NEAR"

Every time there is a Divine Liturgy, the priest invites the faithful to take part in the Table of Life **"with fear of God and faith and love"**. With his invitation, the priest points out how well prepared our soul and body must be in order to sit at Christ's Supper.

The Fathers of the Church tell us about the way in which we must receive Holy Communion:

Saint John Chrysostom says, "When you are about to draw near this divine and dreadful Table, with fear and trembling, with a clear conscience, with fasting (of the soul and body) and prayer, you should do so without any commotion, without stepping on and pushing the person who is next to you. For, this lack of order manifests the great madness and ignorance that is exists towards the holy Mysteries. Those who act in this way receive hell and punishment. Holy Communion is a saving medicine that heals our infirmities; it is everlasting richness and the cause of the Kingdom of heaven.

Let us therefore sense this trembling, as we draw near to commune. Let us tear and mourn for the sins we have committed. After we have cleansed ourselves, let us draw near so that we may commune with silence and order that are appropriate, for we are drawing near the Kingdom of Heaven. After

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[1] Mark 16,3

we have received the blameless and holy Sacrifice - that is to say Christ's Holy Body and Blood - let us kiss It incessantly, let us embrace It with our eyes, let us fill our intellect with spiritual fervor so that our Church gathering may not be the cause of condemnation and censure, but the cause of our soul's moderation, love, virtue, reconciliation with God, and firmness of peace. May our gathering become the foundation of myriads of gifts, so that we may not only sanctify ourselves but also make our neighbors sound in the faith."[1]

We must absolutely draw near our Lord's most holy Table, wearing a bridal garment. Moreover, the most important jewel of this spiritual garment is the love towards all and mainly our enemies, to those who have tempted us, have treated us unjustly, have robbed us blind, have dishonored us, and have ruined us. Remission and concession are the jewels of love.

Abba Isaac the Syrian says that the Divine Liturgy is the Kingdom of God. In addition, love is the nourishment during the Kingdom's Festal Supper. "God's love is Paradise... In fact, when we find love, we are fed with heavenly Bread... The one who finds love nourishes Christ every day and becomes immortal... Blessed is the one who eats from the Bread of love, Jesus Christ..."In order to cause a spiritual alert so that we are able to maintain and cultivate the virtues, with which we draw near Holy Communion, even more, he says that "... Repentance is the vessel. The vessel's Captain is the fear of God, while love is a divine port. When we have fulfilled love in its practice, then we reach God, the God of love. Life's path has already ended, for we have gone over to the other side, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are present".[2]

However, when the time has come for the priest to invite the faithful, love is preceded by the fear of God.

- **"With FEAR of God and faith and love, draw near..."**

This fear is not the fear of a slave, nor the fear of the person who is terrified, nor is it of psychological nature, or the fear of losing our money, our job, our health and thereafter. It is neither fear nor anxiety. It is the noble sentiment of godliness and contrition, a sentiment of reverence and wisdom. Besides, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".[3]

When you realize that God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ, so that man may become god by grace, you are filled with fear, awe, wonder, and wisdom. If the Cherubim and the Seraphim stand with immense fear reverence before the throne of God, and cover their countenances with their wings, how much moreso ought we striving faithful Christians to stand with holy fear before the most holy Altar and before the holy Cup!

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F 35,456

[2] Gregory Hieromonk, *Church Attendance*, Mount Athos 1991, p.88

[3] Psalm 111,10

• "With fear of God... with FAITH..."

We must draw near Holy Communion not only with fear (awe, reverence, godliness, divine humility), but also with faith. Not an abstract kind of faith, not faith in a supposedly "superior power", but faith in a particular Triune God, exactly the way we confess Him in the Symbol of Faith. The faith that was revealed to us by God Himself, when he became man. Only Orthodoxy includes a divine revelation. Orthodoxy means:

- Faith in the Holy Trinity.
- Faith in the incarnation of the Son and Word in the Person of Jesus Christ.
- Faith in the Mother of God, the person of the Holy Theotokos (Panagia).
- Faith in the Holy Cross, the holy Icons, the Saints and the holy Relics.
- Faith in the holy Canons and the Dogmas of the Church of the seven Ecumenical Councils, as well as in the Holy Tradition.
- Faith in the seven Mysteries and especially in the four saving Mysteries (Baptism, Chrismation, Holy Eucharist, Holy Confession).

There should be no doubt or hesitation in the heart of a Christian who receives Holy Communion that What he is partaking is the Body and Blood of Christ. If he does not believe it, he must not draw near!

189. Once, in a certain village there lived a harsh person, who was influenced by materialistic theories and who eventually ended up being an atheist and a non-believer existentialist...

Therefore, during Christmas time the forty-year-old Mr. Costas was in Lower Vrondou, his relatives' hometown. On Christmas Eve, he met Father George Kazakidis, a most reverent priest in the village square.

- Good morning, Mr. Costas, said the priest.

He did not answer. "Religion is peoples' opium", he thought. "Why should I speak with the priest?"

- You, Father George said, have no faith. Nevertheless, come to Church in the morning and you shall believe. The priest left...

At 5.00 o'clock in the morning, the bells of Saint Theodore rang. The village was covered in white. It was snowing all night... Mr. Costas, went to Church out of curiosity, when the Divine Liturgy was just getting started. The whole Church was packed. He stood somewhere indifferent... until it was time for the priest to come out with Holy Communion.

- "With fear of God..." said the priest and he started communing the Christians. But, all of a sudden what does Mr. Costas see? He rubs his eyes repeatedly... again the same thing... What does he see?

Father George was holding an Infant in his arms... bare from the waist up... and from the waist down, He was wrapped with a scarlet

robe... Blood was running down the Infant's chest! The Christians were underneath sipping the drops of Blood and then they were wiping themselves with the scarlet robe that was hanging!

Shortly after, things turned to normal!

"No, it couldn't be! It was just a dream, he thought. It seems that I fell asleep as I was standing". Before he had the chance to finish his thoughts... again there was the same inconceivable vision of God.

A while later Holy Communion was flowing naturally.

Father George elevates the holy Cup and says with a loud voice:

- "O God, save thy people..."

Nevertheless, the forty-year-old Costas cries out even louder:

- I believe, Lord... I believe!

He then falls on his knees weeping...There was an earthquake, a great one within him. He was stunned... His darkness was filled with the lightness of faith. The non-believer became a believer! The dead person was resurrected! The ungodly one had seen the God man Infant, who was Offered for the salvation of the world... Thus, it was a true Christmas experience for Costas![1]

• "With fear of God and faith and LOVE..."

The conditions for taking part in the holy Cup are not only the godly yearning and proper faith, but love as well. When we receive Holy Communion, the love of God, which is the noblest feeling, must reign in our hearts.

Love is based on forgiveness. Forgiveness and the kiss of love constitute the supreme Sacrifice. It is in fact the saving Holy Communion's most basic requirement that God requests. Unfortunately, the majority of people do not commune bearing this love and therefore resemble someone who has fasted and went to commune Easter day. However, when he saw his enemy in the Church, he became so upset that he forgot not only where he was but also the sacred moment he was in and he pulled out a knife to kill him! He would have killed him, if he were not held back! Cruel hearts, which are not able to soften, not even in the Church, or before the divine flame of God's infinite love. Yet, the Lord is our model, Who while on the Cross cried: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do".[2]

Other examples of models are the Martyrs and our Holy Fathers who imitated Our Savior Christ's gentleness and love, with the First Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen being the first: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge",[3] he said while he was being stoned and murdered.

As Christians and God's true children, we ought to keep His commandments especially those that have to do with love. This is why "love your ene-

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Luk. 23,34

[3] Acts 7,60

mies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you".[1]

"With fear of God, with faith and with love draw near..."

Christians who do not have **fear** and reverence towards God, who have no **faith** in the Mystery of Divine Worship and have no **love** towards their neighbor who uses them, should not be allowed to partake of the Mystery of Holy Communion. Moreover, Christians who are not allowed to commune also include those who are faced with obstacles that prevent them from receiving Holy Communion but most of all those who do not go for confession.

During the first Christian era, Christians used to commune the way priests, deacons and bishops would commune in the Holy Altar: first the Lord's Body Which they took in their right palm, and second the Blood Which they drank from the holy Cup. In this way, however, there were many big losses and our Church decided that Holy Communion would be administered as it is done nowadays, that is to say by using the holy Spoon, since dropping The Lord's Blood or a certain Pearl is considered sacrilegious.

By exception, priests still commune the Body separately, by taking the section of the Holy Lamb sealed **XC** saying: **"The Precious and All-Holy Body of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ is imparted unto me, the unworthy presbyter N..., unto forgiveness of my sins and unto life everlasting".**

Next, the Celebrant takes three sips from the holy Cup and says, **"The Precious and All-Holy Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, is imparted unto me, the unworthy presbyter N..., unto forgiveness of my sins and unto life everlasting. In the Name of the Father (one sip) and of the Son (one sip) and of the Holy Spirit (one sip). Amen".** The fact that the all-holy Blood is imparted unto the priest three times means that the soul of the communicant unites with the triune Divinity through the Mystery of Divine Worship.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem mentions that during his time the Celebrant Priest would urge the communicant Christian who had received Holy Communion, to put the three fingers on his lips while they were still damp after having partaken of the Blood of the Lord and then bless his eyes, his ears, his forehead and arms.[2] This was withdrawn since there were often examples of carelessness; this is why there is the "**maktron**" or "kalima", the scarlet cloth, which helps the communicants to avoid accidents. We do not recommend it; we simply mention it. We shall only do the sign of the Cross, which is more than enough, for Holy Communion sanctifies the whole person psychosomatically.

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[1] Mat. 5,44

[2] Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, L.G.F.C.A. 39, p.262

As the faithful are being communed, the holy chanters chant:

- "Of thy mystic supper, O Son of God, accept me today..."
- "Into the splendor of Thy Saints..."
- In addition, during Paschal days: "Receive the Body of Christ; and taste of the Immortal Spring. Alleluia".

190. A certain monk, whose name was Father Anthimos, was living in a monastery's coenobium (community of monks and nuns) for approximately twenty years. Later, with the blessing of his Abbott and Gerondas, he went to the desert.

For about ten extremely hard years, he was completely alone. Much later, he created a small company of two brothers. During the winter of approximately the ninth year, he fell very ill. He must have had very high temperature. For three weeks, he was struggling under very severe circumstances with no fire, warm tea, or any kind of help whatsoever.

One morning there was a knock on the door and the voice of someone saying "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers..." He only just managed to say "Amen" soullessly. A young Monk extremely ascetic whose countenance was glowing by exceptional purity entered...

- Father Anthimos, I brought you some fish. We will make fish soup so that you may come round a little...

The visitor bent down to kiss his hand. He lit a fire and the cell warmed up a bit. Then he started boiling the fish. While the food was getting ready, he took care of the patient, tidied up and put the hermit Father Anthimos' two areas in order. He massaged, gave him some tea and hot soup... This took place for two weeks. Gradually, Father Anthimos recuperated.

The Monk said that his name was father Paisios and that he was a hermit in the deep desert. In fact, the more father Anthimos was recovering, the more he noticed that the young Monk was orderly in everything: the cleaning, the cooking, his canons, his all-night vigils, he was even more severe in his fasting etc.

One morning the Monk visitor asked father Anthimos if he wished to commune and the latter accepted. The following day, before dawn, father Gregory the Spiritual father, familiar to all came to commune him. Father Paisios escorted him with a vigil lamp.

The Holy Communion father Anthimos received remained unforgettable for many years. For many days and nights, he was overwhelmed by divine joy. He sensed that he was clothed in the Lord and Savior Himself in a god woven way...

At the end of week three father Anthimos had totally recovered. Father Paisios said goodbye by making a deep veneration and left! He disappeared and father Anthimos never saw him again!

During a festivity in the Skete, father Anthimos met father Gregory and thanked him, for going all the way up that difficult path in order to commune him.

- And when did this happen? Asked father Gregory

- In the wintertime, when I was quite ill...

- Ah, it was not me, the priest replied.

- So then, who was it, and who was father Paisios?...

- Come on, tell me what happened?

Hence, father Anthimos said everything... And father Gregory's response was:

- Come on, you blessed one! It was your Angel... Our Holy Theotokos (Panagia) must have sent him to you... Ascribe glory to God and that is all.

A great event ended so simply and with no further explanation.[1]

Who was the one who had communed father Anthimos and what was it that he had communed, we shall never find out. Our Holy God's judgment is an abyss.

"Man was made to liturgize. He was made to be offered and to offer God his Creator Thanksgiving, Doxology and Divine Worship...Therefore, through this continual offering and Worship, he would be united with God, be sanctified, be alive!

This is why a superabundance of triune gifts was given to him. The primordial gifts of Divine Righteousness were given to man, so that he may be able to have a Liturgical relationship, a relationship of Worship with God... Adam and Eve's nous, understanding, their word, their will, their freedom, the good, their sinless state, the gentleness, the purity, the immaculate, dispassion, the blessedness, through their yearning tended towards Worshipping our Holy God. Adam and Eve's communion with the Angels and with God was a liturgical relationship, one of Worship. Through this Worship, man who was "according to His image" - his soul- tended and headed dynamically and without any trouble towards that which was "according to His likeness".

Thus, in all certainty, we stress that Divine Worship was Adam and Eve's intimate relationship and union with God. (This is what Divine Worship is all about: communion with God!) Therefore, their life in Paradise was a Divine Liturgy... (Not the way we minister it here, but union with God.)

Nevertheless, as man fell due to his self-centeredness and pride, he lost his potential to offer and be offered to God in a eucharistic way, and there-

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[1] Lazarus monk Dionysiatis, *Stories from the Monastery of Dionysios* ... ibid, p.187-189

fore was not able to ever take part in Paradise's **"concelebration"** with the Angels. (For the Angels also continually offer their Worship to God. This is what Adam and Eve used to do. Thus, what they had was a "concelebration", not in today's sense, but in the sense of offering to God.) As a result, self-exiled from the Liturgy of Paradise, man found himself on earth **without having attended or taken part in the Divine Liturgy**.

The "image according to God" was spoiled. The nous, understanding was darkened. The will became feeble. The senses became lax. Desires became distorted; hence, the recollections of divine communion and liturgical life in Paradise were erased. Whatever memories Adam and Eve may have had were erased, lost! They were all erased by sin. It goes that way! Whatever communion we may have with God through liturgical and spiritual life, with sin it is all gone, nothing is left inside...

Some remnants that were left in Adam and Eve urged them to erect primitive altars, so that they may offer Worship to God. Worship, which until then was spiritual, later took place through animal sacrifice. At best, it was a model and shade of the first Worship in Paradise. However, it most certainly did not bring man into perfect communion and real union with God, like in the beginning. He was not granted the Holy Spirit. He could not escape from sorrow, pain and death.

Nevertheless, there was one good thing about this altar: that man was cultivated to yearn and expect the messianic Liturgy, the coming in the world of the Messiah Whose Sacrifice would give us his Liturgy.

God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ "by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary". He is the Great "High Priest after the order of Melchizedek",[1] "without father" and "without mother",[2] who began the concelebration of the New Testament, which lasted for three years, with His Life that was most blameless and without sin, with His divine teaching and His Sacrifice on the Cross.

This inconceivable concelebration takes shape on Great and Holy Thursday night, with the Mystical Supper, it is fulfilled on the Cross and sealed with His Resurrection. Christ was He that offereth and is offered in a perfect way; the blameless sacrifice that is being offered, the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world".[3]

The person and people who do not attend the liturgy have wandered about in the authority of the devil and death with their pitfalls and sins. Yet, Christ with His Sacrifice on the Cross and His Resurrection gave man his freedom from the tyranny of the devil, of sin, and that of death and was granted the potential to partake in the concelebration of the New Testament after all, that is, to offer himself to God, to worship God, to thank God and to glorify Him!...

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[1] Heb. 5,10 [2] Heb. 7,3 [3] Jn 1,29

Only through the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, Divine Worship and Holy Eucharist, man is able to exist as a HUMAN BEING, for he functions "according to His image", which tends towards "His likeness".

Do you partake of the immaculate Mysteries?

- You partake of Divinity. You have become incorruptible! You taste immortality and eternal life! You become Christ-like! You bear the Holy Spirit!
- You are no longer the animal - human with animal instincts.
- You are not Nitche's superman.
- You are not only made to function biologically.
- Nor are you part of a consuming, capitalistic or socialistic society,
- You are a man of God! Made "according to the image and likeness of God", therefore, this man exists as a HUMAN BEING in Divine Worship.

The Liturgy of the New Testament is much higher compared to the Liturgy of Adam and Eve in Paradise. Why is that? For now, the Archpriest is the Son and Word of God Himself Who was incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Holy Theotokos and all the Saints of the Triumphant Church together with the Angels and Archangels are concelebrating and co glorifying the All-Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit "with incessant mouths and unceasing doxologies".[1]

We say again that the Divine Worship:

- Started with the incarnation of God the Word,
- was instituted during the Mystical Supper on Great and Holy Thursday,
- was fulfilled on Golgotha with His Crucifixion, His Death and His Entombment
- and was sealed with His Resurrection.

"And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain",[2] the voice of Paul proclaims. Without Christ's Resurrection, everything is empty and nil. This is why every Divine Liturgy is also a confession of the Resurrection. "Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ...," we say every time in the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy with its Holy Communion is in itself the Resurrection of Christ. (He who communes properly is able to sense it.) Moreover, every time the Divine Liturgy is served here on earth and on the Holy Altar Table, apart from being a confession of faith in the Resurrection, it is also the sense of experiencing the Ascension and the Sitting of the Son and God at the right hand as well as divine Blessedness and the Glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is why we proclaim: **"We have seen the true Light"**!

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[1] Kapsanis George, Abbott Of the Holy Monastery of Saint Gregory, *Saint Gregory, magazine*, issue 4, 1979, p.31 and thereafter

[2] I Cor. 15,17

Nowadays our greatest sin is that we do not attend the liturgy. We do not offer and are not offered to our all-holy God and brethren. In the past not having attended the liturgy was considered an insult, whereas nowadays, due to our hardheartedness, wickedness, weakness, our passions and our transgressions, not going to Church is thought of as something completely natural, while it is unnatural when someone goes for confession, attends the liturgy and receives Holy Communion regularly. (They say, "Something is wrong with him. He has lost it!").

"With fear of God and faith and love, draw near".

God demands from us a proper psychosomatic preparation and conduct, in order to receive the all-immaculate Mysteries. We receive God's benefits in fear, the triune gifts in faith and adoption in love.

"The parable of the Sower tells us that the farmer did not go out to plow but to sow. In this way, God wants to show us that plowing and the way the earth is prepared is something that involves all of us. That is to say, the preparation of the soul is on the one hand, a personal matter therefore it is up to us to do it, but on the other, its blessing and fruit belong to God.

The fear of God is the first step to cultivation. According to the Fathers, fear is the beginning stage of every virtue, but at the same time it is born through living faith, while it is sown inside the heart, once the nous, understanding is gradually separated from the world and all its concerns."[1]

Saint Maximos the Confessor tells us that there are two kinds of fear of God, the introductory and the perfect.

- **The first** one is born within our soul from the threats of hell. As of this fear, self-control, hope in God, apathy and love are born one after another.
- **The second** kind of fear is related to love itself. This fear gives birth to godliness, so that the soul may not despise God due to a sense of boldness created by love".[2]

Man is no longer afraid of anything except of falling off the height of love. For this reason, after having partaken of the immortal nourishment of divine Love, we ask the Lord to strengthen us in His holy fear: **"Strengthen all of us in Thy fear, Lord..."**. Any Christian who has perfect, true love, is also led to perfect fear, which is not the fear of hell and that of sinking and punishment, but the fear lest we fall from God's love."[3]

By fear, we mean total respect and reverence towards God. The use of the word "fear" before the holy Cup, stresses the Angels' stance before God's all-glorious throne. The "fear" of Angels before God's throne should resemble our own "fear" before the holy Cup, thus it should not be the fear of a slave, but that of reverence and great godliness.

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,369A,B

[2] Saint Maximos the Confessor, *Philokalia...*, ibid, vol. 2, p.57

[3] Abba Dorotheos, *Works of the Ascetics*, Kareas 1991, p.143

As soon as the Celebrant priest communes, he says the following words: **"Lo, this hath touched my lips and shall take away mine iniquities and purge away my sins"** and he kisses the holy Cup. This is what the **Prophet Isaiah** said when through a vision of God he was called to the prophetic office. The Angel Seraphim approaches the all-heavenly Altar and with tongs he takes off a burning coal that touches Prophet Isaiah's mouth and tells him: "Behold, this has touched thy lips, and will take away thine iniquities, and will purge off thy sins".[1]

The Seraphim did not dare touch the coal, which symbolizes Christ, with their hands, whereas we priests, not only do we touch Him but we also divide Him and consume Him. During that moment, our mouths, our hands and our entire psychosomatic being become more superior to all the archangelic Powers!

Saint Symeon the New Theologian says the following: "To those Christians who can only see physically not spiritually, divine Bread appears as sensorial bread, while in a noetic way it is an uncontainable and inaccessible Light. It is the Body and Blood of Christ. Hence, when you partake of the divine Bread and you drink of the Wine of divine Gladness, do you not then realize that you lead a life of immortality and that you have received within you the Bread shining and fiery? Not Prophet Isaiah's burning coal, but Life eternal! Moreover, your soul has come near Divinity's inaccessible fire!

Nevertheless, how are you to sense all this, since you are full of wickedness, malice, selfishness, pride and vanity? How will you be able to feel it since you are captivated by jealousy, envy and daily condemnation?

Saint Symeon continues by saying that Holy Communion is the Light that illuminates you, but you are blind and unable to see it, so you are not illuminated. divine Fire gives you warmth, yet you remain cold, rigid and unhealed. It is Life... and Life has come to you nonetheless you are not resurrected, you remain a lifeless person!"[2]

Saint John of Damascus tells us "through the partaking of the Holy Eucharist's divine Fire, sins must be burnt down and passions weakened. At the same time, we must be "burning and deified" through the divine Coal. Our whole hearts must become one with fire! As we receive Holy Communion we must sense that within us there is a banquet, a marvelous celebration, a Paschal feast ..."[3]

Perhaps you have noticed that when you receive Holy Communion during weekdays, you are under the impression that it is Sunday, that it is a day of celebration, that you are filled with inexplicable joy! The sense of Resurrection is what Holy Communion's marvelous celebration is all about.

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[1] Is. 6,7

[2] Gregory Hieromonk, *The Divine Liturgy...*, ibid, p.336

[3] Saint John of Damascus, *A precise Publication...*, ibid, p.370

In reality, the immaculate Mysteries form a Paschal feast, a marvelous banquet, a psychosomatic inexplicable joy, a passing from that which can be seen and perceived and is secular, to what is heavenly. From that which is corrupt to that which is incorrupt and eternal, from the Sacrifice on earth to the most pure Heavenly Sacrifice, where in a state of amazement the soul enjoys Christ Himself "in God the Father and of one essence with the Spirit that always sees Christ and is also seen by Him."

191. According to Demetrios Dudko, a priest in Russia one day preached the following incident:

"In the 1940-1943 war, during a battle many were injured. They took them to a tent until they were taken to hospital and there it was! At some point one of them, without any hope of surviving, sees... He saw a vision of God!

He saw Saint Barbara approaching the injured men with the Holy Cup and giving them Holy Communion! She communed all of them apart from him, for she passed by him.

Then the young man told her with a tone of complaint:

- Won't you give me Holy Communion?

She answered:

- You do not need to. After a while, you shall be able to commune by yourself.

And the priest confessed to the faithful who were listening to the sermon:

-Yes, there was no hope of surviving, but I made it! It had never crossed my mind that I could also become a priest. Therefore, here I am! I commune as the Saint had already told me. Now, I commune by myself, by myself![1]

Furthermore, since then he must certainly have imparted the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ unto a large number of Christians who drew near every time he served the Divine Liturgy!

Now, we come back to the Communion of the faithful. The priest says, as he is imparting Holy Communion from the holy Cup:

♦ **"THE SERVANT OF GOD, (NAME), PARTAKES OF THE PRECIOUS AND ALL-HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF**

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[1] Personal notes

OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, UNTO THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND UNTO LIFE EVERLASTING".

The faithful person, like the priest, communes with his first name. With the name that was given to him when he became the son of God; when he was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Holy Communion is an entirely personal moment. It is our personal meeting and union with our Lord Jesus Christ. I am also This Person. I am also That Person and no one else! Through the Celebrant priest's voice, Christ is calling us with our first name, close to Him. He is the good Shepherd, Who "calleth his own sheep by name",[1] as the Holy Scriptures assure. In addition, the rational sheep draw near the holy Cup and receive holy Nourishment that grants them immortality, incorruption and eternal life.

Saint John Chrysostom affirms: "So, when you see the Celebrant priest giving you the immaculate Mysteries, do not think that the priest is doing this, but the all-holy hand of Christ, which stretches out to you", through the priest's hand!

Christ the Shepherd is the sheep's door, the Beautiful Gate of eternal Life. In fact, the rational sheep go in and out of this Gate and "find pasture". Actually, the strangest thing of all is that the sheep's pasture is the Shepherd Himself!

If Divine Worship is in its entirety an endless ocean of gifts of our triune God's Divine Grace and Love, the moment of Holy Communion is the complete entrance of our gift giving Savior Christ within us.[2]

As soon as we commune, we have immediately become one with the Body and flesh of Christ! We feel certain vividness within us, certain strength, certain robustness, a certain transformation in soul and body! We sense a marvelous banquet, a love celebration. We sense something that transfigures us making us radiant, a strange beam that leads us to the infinite divine beauty! The first fruit of Holy Communion is the feeling that we are in union with Jesus Christ!

192. In a convent situated in Macedonia they were having "Trapeza" (meal in the refectory of a monastic or parish community) at midday. After "Trapeza" the trapezarissa (head of Trapeza) who was also, an assistant started putting away the plates and through the hallway they took them to the kitchen. At some point in the space in between there was a loud noise, a tray had fallen down and all the plates broke into pieces on the marble floor.

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[1] Jn. 10,3

[2] Saint John Chrysostom, P.G. 58,507

The Abbess, who had not left the Trapeza, immediately went to see what was going on. She saw a nun by herself bent, picking up the broken pieces. In a marked austere tone, she told her:

- Did you do this?

- Bless, [forgive in Monastic language] the nun replied.

The Gerondissa continued in the same tone:

- Tomorrow Sunday you are not to receive Holy Communion and you shall have five hundred prostrations to do.

- May it be blessed, answered the nun and continued picking up the pieces and cleaning up the place.

The following day, Sunday, the nun, remained on her knees, while tears were running down her cheeks, from the start "Blessed is the Kingdom..." until the end of the Divine Liturgy.

When Holy Communion had begun, the nun put her head on the ground watering it with her tears. She remained in this position until the end of the Divine Liturgy. As the Abbess was the last one to leave the Church, she noticed the nun who was in this position, came near her and asked her what was going on.

The nun remained silent and as the Abbess was being extremely persistent, very hesitantly and timidly she replied that during the time when the nuns were partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, suddenly she lifted up her head and one portion slipped out of the holy Spoon and entered her mouth.

The Abbess then asked her:

- Which nun was next in line, when this happened?

- She bowed her head, very gently and very hesitantly said the nun's name.

- Now, considering this miracle and in the Name of our Holy God, you shall tell me what happened yesterday, said the Abbess. You shall tell me the whole truth.

- When I left the Trapeza with the tray full of plates and as I was passing from the space in between, this particular nun came and pushed me with her two hands, so I fell down causing this damage.

(God restored the truth in a supernatural way, rewarding the nun's holy humility and depriving the other of the Grace).

Afterwards the Abbess called the other nun and asked her:

- Please, tell me, what did you partake of today?

- And she replied:

- Nothing, for the holy Spoon was empty!!![1]

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[1] Personal notes

So great was Christ's love for man who fell, sinned, and revolted that he was not able to wash away his shame and pay back his debt, that he became man "by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary" and paid back once and for all our own debts on the Cross. Nevertheless, He did not settle to only go through the Passion, the Burial and the Resurrection. He proceeded by offering us Holy Communion.

In one of his homilies, **Saint John Chrysostom** says the following: "Man - Christ cries out - for you I was spat and struck, I made Myself void from glory, I left my Father and came to you, who hate me and detest me and do not even wish to hear my Name. I ran to you and pursued you so that you can be mine. I united and related you to Myself. I told you: Eat from my Body and drink from my Blood. I have you both in heaven and down on earth I am united with you... (He has us in heaven, for He took up the human nature.) I am not simply united with you, but also intertwined I am being consumed, gradually become thinner so that my involvement, intertwining and union may be greater. For those things which are united, keep their limit, I however am interwoven with you. That is to say, I do not wish anyone to be in between us; I wish that the two are ONE - me and you!"[1]

Moreover, elsewhere the Saint adds: "...This Blood revives your royal image, that is to say "according to Your image". This Blood gives birth to the indescribable divine beauty in your heart. This Blood does not allow the soul's nobleness to be withered, for It constantly waters and nourishes it. This Blood is the salvation of our souls... and with it our soul is bathed and adorned and is made radiant... This Blood makes our understanding extremely bright and more magnificent than fire. This Blood illuminates the countenance, relaxes the senses and pacifies the soul..."[2]

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas writes: "Holy Communion sanctifies and makes the entire psychosomatic human being radiant, for one soul intermingles with the other soul - one body with the other body- one blood with the other blood... God's judgment is an abyss, His Mysteries are magnificent...

What great a miracle, our nous getting mixed with that of Christ's! His Will with our will becoming one mixture... also His Body with our body and His Blood with our blood!

I wonder, what becomes of our nous, when the divine Nous prevails? What becomes of our will when the divine Will prevails? What becomes of soil and clay when divine Fire conquers?

Indeed, Holy Communion makes worthy those of us who are laudable of receiving It, who are similar with HIM by Grace and communion, Who Alone is, the only One Who is Holy, the only One who is Good, the only One Who is True!".[3]

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[1] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F. 23,404

[2] Ibid, P.G. 57,261

[3] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,584D-585A

193. A certain Christian went to Saint Nicholas' Church, which was celebrating in order to attend the Divine Liturgy. There were many people and he went to the very front, the 'solea' (elevated area at the eastern-most end of the nave running the length of the iconostasis).

After the sermon, there was Holy Communion.

Following the words "With fear of God..." the Christians started being communed. With all the throng, great upheaval and pushing, the faithful spilled the Holy Communion. The priests stopped communing and somewhat removed the people...

Then this Christian saw... What did he see? He saw on the solea, at the spot where they spilled the Holy Communion, a white bouncing flame. "Unlike the flames we know", he said. "This one was white and wavy!" This is how he saw it.

The priest and deacon entered the Holy Altar and left the holy Cup on the Holy Table. The priest exited once again, knelt, bent down and started sipping the flame!... After he swallowed all of it, it disappeared!

Later the deacon came with a small bottle of alcohol and a match and lit up a fire. However, this flame was different from the previous one.

The Christian was in a state of shock. Day and night, he was being tormented by what his eyes had seen. An earthquake had taken place within him and so he decided to go for confession. He had never seen a Spiritual Father's stole before. He had not received Holy Communion for forty years![1]

In fact, there are Christians who refuse to believe in the great Mystery and Miracle of Divine Conversion and then they talk about transmitting diseases, because the Spoon is common to all. In this way, they are estranged to Christ's true faith, which says: "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed".[2]

The Body of Christ restores health when God wishes to, It makes tumors disappear, heals cancer; it does not transmit illnesses, as some blasphemе. Actually, due to this blasphemy they many times also end up in heresy. This is why the **Apostle Paul** poses the question: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?".[3]

Therefore, an outcast and a stranger is not only he who refuses to receive Holy Communion because he feels disgusted, nor he who refuses the Miracle in Divine Worship, but the one who draws near to commune when in fact he is unprepared and unworthy. "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord".[4]

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Jn. 6,55 [3] I Cor. 10,16 [4] I Cor. 11,27

Nevertheless, the faithful Christian, who communes "With fear of God and faith and love", with extreme reverence, with a sense of awareness, with prudent preparation, he is made worthy of a great number of gifts and of many spiritual talents.

- **The first gift** is our union with Christ by Grace. He Himself assures it: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him".[1]
- **The second gift** is the one through which the communicant Christian partakes of from **NOW** to eternity. He acquires the taste of immortal life, the taste of immortality, coming from the Lord's lips that cannot lie: "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life".[2]
- **The third gift**, which is also the fruit of the worthy partaking of Holy Communion, is his resurrection during His Second fearful Coming and Judgment; resurrection of life eternal and not that of hell."...and I will raise him up at the last day".[3] We await Him Who Comes "to judge the living and the dead" and at the same time, we partake of Him Who Comes. We partake of the joy that is to come. Thus death is nothing more than our passing from the temporal to the eternal, from what is corrupt to what is incorrupt, from temporary life to life eternal; it is a passing from the Table of Holy Eucharist on earth to the Festal Table of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- **The fourth gift** is the creation of a holy spiritual dwelling within our hearts: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith".[4] For, faith is oxygen divine through which our Christ is able to breathe, once He enters our hearts with His Body and Blood.

Through the divine - human powers of His Precious Body and His All-Holy Blood, he continually sustains and nourishes our understanding, our senses, our heart, our judgment and all our psychosomatic powers. Moreover, it makes us strong against the world of passion and malice, strong before the devil and strong facing the fear of hell, of death and of Hades.

Without an ecclesiastical sacramental life of Divine Communion, man has an empty heart and a darkened nous; he is evil and malicious; miserable and wicked; he is feeble and negligent. Generally, he is incapable of leading a holy evangelical life for the freezing wind of spiritual death has come along his path. All this because he stubbornly refuses to be cleansed through the bath of Confession and Repentance so that he may be able to partake of the Cup of Life!

- **The fifth gift** of Holy Communion is the advance and growth of spiritual gifts with fasting, vigil, prayer, implemented love, and a great deal of patience. "...speaking the truth in love, we might grow up into Him in all things, Who is the head - the Christ".[5]

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[1] Jn. 6,56 [2, 3] Jn. 6,54 [4] Eph. 3,17 [5] Eph. 4,15

• **The sixth marvelous gift** is that Holy Communion cleanses us from sins those ones that are considered pardonable, which were committed from the time following Holy Confession up to Holy Communion. **"The servant of God, (name), partakes of the precious and all-holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting"** we usually hear the priest saying when we receive Holy Communion.

The burning coal of Holy Communion burns down our sins and at the same time warms up the heart, illuminates our mind and grants the foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven, when of course we draw near in a state of psychosomatic cleanliness, "with fear of God and faith and love".

• **The seventh marvelous fruit** of Holy Communion is the sanctification of the soul and body. In reality, Holy Communion sanctifies us, illuminates us, It makes us graceful. In this way, fantasies are driven away, wicked thoughts are banished, the senses calm down and passions are mortified.

The psychosomatic cleanliness of the Christian who draws near grants him divine illumination, offers him boldness towards God, that is to say, the heart at that moment following Holy Communion is ready to be in her own state of boldness towards our Holy God. (Make use of it, also!) It increases, reinforces the virtues and thus leads us to perfection.

All gifts require that we have repentance, we are consistent with the life of the gospel, we have a humble spirit, we have greathearted patience, cleanliness and moderation, works of faith and works of effectual love, in fact towards those who treat us unfairly, who hate us, who tempt us, as well as our enemies. A synopsis of these gifts is the foretaste of the Kingdom of God, for Christ is He that offereth, "...that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".[1]

However, there are many more gifts, myriads we could say, some of which are the following:

◆ **The First Gift is Freedom.**

Holy Communion, which is the Crucified and Resurrected Body of God Man and our Lord Jesus Christ, not only releases us from the devil and death, but also mortifies our passions. This mortification frees us from the dynasty of passions. Frequent partaking of Holy Communion through repentance and tearing liberates us from all that which makes us look repulsive and spiritually distorts us.

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[1] *Jn.* 3,16

◆ **The Second Gift is Beauty in Christ.**

With Holy Communion we once again receive the divine beauty of Paradise lost. Christ grants us "inexplicable beauty", incorruptible beauty, heavenly charm, splendor and beauty in Christ.

◆ **The Third Gift is perfect love.**

He who holds Christ fast within him through Holy Communion in a worthily manner becomes god by Grace and partakes of the triune divine Love, the love that bore fruit on Golgotha. His whole being savors the tenderhearted, man-befriending and paternal divine Love. His whole being becomes one with love. The soul is ready - it has this sense - and this is the fruit of Holy Communion - to embrace the whole world. To impart the joy it has inside. The soul does not wish to keep it for itself. It wishes to offer it to the entire world... Nevertheless, it knows of no other way but to love... It is a sacrificial kind of love.

◆ **The Fourth Gift is peace.**

Whoever receives Holy Communion in a fitting, prepared and worthy way, receives "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding".[1] Besides, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ".[2] Thus, every time we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ in all cleanliness and repentance we notice that our senses are peaceful, our thoughts are peaceful, and our soul is peaceful! In this way, we experience peace in the life of the Ascetics, peace in the life of the Saints, the Martyrs!... (Even though their body parts were cut, nevertheless, they were peaceful!)

The mind of the faithful Christian is overwhelmed just by thinking all the numerous gifts and talents that they are granted through Divine Worship. They stand in awe not knowing how to give thanks and glorify our gift-giving God. However, they also have fear... holy fear, so that they may not lose the gifts... these heavenly talents and eventually lose Christ, their Savior and Redeemer.

When I visited Mount Athos particularly the Skete of Saint Anna, a monk told me the following marvelous incident:

194. A ninety-year-old monk Father Gideon a hermit in Kafsokalyvia was seriously ill in bed and at the same time blind. Although he was old of age, his words were flowing honey, full of grace. His patience set an example. He prayed incessantly. His heart was fiery and the way he fasted - despite his age- was amazing.

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[1] Philip. 4,7

[2] Rom. 5,1

On the day of the Annunciation his disciple Father Isaiah, notified a certain priest to come and commune him.

Father Gideon was well known for his dirtiness and messy hair. Yet, whoever would come near him would be amazed by the sweet-smell that came forth from his most ascetic body. His hut, which did no have anything comfortable to offer, was also ascetic. However, upon entering the visitor's face was "struck" by a marvelous heavenly aura, a very strange delicate fragrance.

Father Elpidios accepted the invitation with exceptional joy. He put on his stole, took the holy Cup and set off along with Father Isaiah, who preceded him with a vigil lamp, as they were both whispering the Jesus prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me..."

On the way, there was a downpour. The rain was falling. The rain was falling continuously. They were both "soaking wet". The heavy rain with the immaculate Mysteries on their hands, with the prayer in their lips, with the difficult hard paths and with all that was happening, remained for many years unforgettable to Father Elpidios...

They finally arrived and the priest all at once entered the poor little Church - for every hut and dwelling where the ascetics lived has its own plain small Church - right in front in the Beautiful Gate he was waiting for the blind Father Gideon.

"Of thy mystic supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant..."and Gerondas Gideon exited his cell, with his hair untied, with a cassock that had been patched many times and barefoot. He went forward slowly, as he was holding his disciple, father Isaiah. Immersed in the sweet-smelling fragrance of the incense that was burning and in the Beautiful Gate vigil lamp's and candle's semi light, he partook of the most immaculate Mysteries.

"The servant of God, Monk Gideon, partakes of the Precious and All-Holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting..."

O, behold a miracle! His blind eyes, filled with the tears of contrition, were able to see! Father Gideon cried out in astonishment, wonder and holy emotion:

- I saw the true light... I saw the true light... O, my Christ, I saw your everlasting light... I saw the true light... and slowly went back to his poor, wooden bed as he was saying continually, "I saw the true light... I saw the true light...".

He laid down, placed his arms on his chest cruciform, after making the sign of the Cross, and saying again and again "I saw the true light..." he handed over his sacred soul to the True Light, to His Lord Jesus Christ and Savior, the Only True God. "Light of Light, True God of true God..." the Lord.[1]

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[1] Personal notes

Can one not but marvel at God's magnificent works, which are revealed through the Mystery of Holy Communion "to those who love" Him, that is to say, to those who love and serve Him? Most certainly, one cannot but marvel and glorify!

Infinite are the fruits and gifts when we partake of Holy Communion. As he is mystically being sacrificed on the Holy Altar Table, Jesus Christ engages and unites Himself with each one of us through Holy Communion, provided of course that we are ready, worthy and pure. Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ nourishes with His Precious Body and His Precious Blood those to whom He gives birth through Holy Baptism.

In this way, a great spiritual bond is created, a bond of the same Blood, thus, a bond of true love. We cease to be strangers amongst ourselves for we have all grown to be brothers. The Blood of Jesus Christ, the common Cup has twined and united us. This is why we insist that, those of us who come to the same holy Church and partake of the immaculate Mysteries cannot be strangers amongst ourselves.

With His Incarnation, Christ, says the golden-mouthed voice of **Saint John** (Chrysostom) once again, was clothed in human nature, in human flesh and thus came over to its house, which He created as God. Yet, he observed that this nature was dirty, grease-stained, bare, and hungry and covered in blood. Hence, He took it and bathed it in Holy Baptism. Then He anointed it with many fragrances of the Holy Chrism and afterwards nourished it with Holy Communion...

Apart from all this however, He clothed it in such a garment that nothing like it can be found on earth: Christ Himself became her vesture and received it only to lift it up to the heights of the Kingdom of Heaven and made it sit on the right hand of God the Father rendering it with glory... Thus, after He had bathed all of us in Holy Baptism and scented us with Holy Chrism..., He now nourishes us with Holy Communion..."[1] Immediately, He clothes us in Himself, and with the words **"we have seen the true light..."** He seizes us, takes us up to the heavens and makes us joint heirs of God's Kingdom.

Furthermore, as in the joy of heaven, there are not any strangers, for Angels and Archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, the Apostles and Martyrs and Prophets and Saints and Unmercenaries and the Christians who have been saved constitute one Body, the Body of the Triumphant Church, likewise on earth, the communing Christians of the Militant Church constitute one Body. They are not strangers but brothers. Members of the one Body of the Church of Christ.

[1] Saint John Chrysostom, G.C.F. 33,388

After all the faithful have been communed, the priest elevates the Holy Cup and says:

♦ **"O GOD, SAVE THY PEOPLE AND BLESS THINE INHERITANCE".**

We well understand the fact that God saves His people. Actually, it is our fervent request and prayer, to be saved for we are sinful indeed. However, the Christian does not easily understand the fact that God blesses His **"inheritance"**.

How are we, thrice-wretched and filthy, to be called "God's inheritance"? There is only one answer to this: When Christ became man He deified human nature and redeemed us with His all-holy Blood on the Cross. Therefore, if for every Christian this act of our Holy God and Savior Jesus Christ turns out to be a belief, a living experience, Baptism, Chrism and Holy Communion, then all of us indeed constitute "God's inheritance".

Following "O God, save Thy people," the holy chanters majestically chant:

♦ **"WE HAVE SEEN THE TRUE LIGHT. WE HAVE RECEIVED THE HEAVENLY SPIRIT. WE HAVE FOUND THE TRUE FAITH, IN WORSHIPPING THE INDIVISIBLE TRINITY; FOR HE HATH SAVED US".**

With Holy Communion, we receive "the true light" within us. Our soul is being transformed and is glowing, for it has been united with Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. "When we receive Holy Communion, our entire mind gets involved with God and not only does it shine all around with divine Light but it also receives the apocalypse of the unmentioned Mysteries of God".[1]

Saint Symeon the New Theologian tells us that as soon as the Christian has been communed he listens to the words **"we have seen the true Light..."** At once Holy Communion develops into: "light, peace, joy, life, food and drink, garment (bright) and covering (sparkling) tent and dwelling, a sun that is indeed unsetting, an all-shining star and a candle stick which shines inside the soul's dwelling".[2]

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[1] Abba Philemon, *Philokalia*..., ibid, vol. 2, p.321

[2] Saint Symeon the New Theologian, *Philokalia*..., ibid, vol. 19 E, p.222

It is a fact that we live in ignorance, within the darkness of sin, within the savagery of passions and the cares of this wretched life. Therefore, all that is being said about Holy Communion, about the truths of the Holy Eucharist, about its fruits, its graces and gifts, about its light and joy, about a bright and glowing garment and so many others, most of the time they seem to us unrealistic; an alphabet that is difficult to comprehend.

In any case, it is the living truth. They are neither fantasies, nor images, or dreams, but vivid, tangible truths. For God is Light, an everlasting and unsetting, unwaning and lovely Light! Christ is the true Light! "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life",[1] Christ Himself proclaimed. We saw and took pleasure in His holy Transfiguration up on Mount Tabor.

The faithful communicant Christians were once the children of Light, "light bearing children of the Church". Unfortunately, today, not only are we snuffed out candles and vigil lamps without any light, but also hate the light!..."For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light..."[2] Even though the majority of people detest the light, just like moles that live underground, nevertheless, the Light, the everlasting Light of Christ, shines and shall shine to the ages of ages, even if we do not wish to see.

Upon listening to the words **"we have seen the true light..."** our all-holy Triune God imparts His three-sun Light in the souls of those Christians who are worthy communicants! Therefore, their entire psychosomatic world reflects the Grace and the beaming rays of the true lovely Light, which dwells in them.

195. A priest, after I kept insisting, told me the following amazing and supernatural story, which occurred during the Divine Liturgy.

It was one Saturday morning in autumn and the aforementioned priest was serving the liturgy in a neighborhood parish in Athens. The Church's sacristan was also the chanter that day.

It was time to commune the five-six children who were present. After he had communed them, he entered the Holy Altar and left the Holy Cup on the Holy Table, took the censer, started censing and saying "Be thou exalted, O God..." thrice. The sacristan then began chanting, "We have seen the true Light..." Well, at that point an incredible lightning, a supernatural Light was coming from the holy Cup and the Holy Table to the point that the entire Holy Table, Holy Altar and Church had been overshadowed. However, he was the only one to notice the miracle.

He was in a state of amazement and paralyzed with the censer in his hand for a long time marveling at this excessively great event. He

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[1] Jn. 8,12

[2] Jn. 3,20

was most certainly captivated by reverence, awe, holy fear, astonishment, supernatural joy, he did not know whether he was coming or going, a situation that he experienced for the first and last time, as he told me.

The spiritual states in the Celebrant Priest's soul came one after another while he was wondering in an ecstatic way and marveling at God's magnificent works, which had overshadowed himself, the Holy Altar, the Holy Gifts and the Church.

After a while and under the sacristan's pressure who was crying out to him:

- Come on, my priest, say "Always, now and ever...", the priest managed to say it eventually, as his whole being was trembling, and the Light which was beyond this world, was still there.

He then proceeded to the remaining part of the Divine Liturgy and when he reached the Dismissal and said "Glory to thee, O Christ our God and our Hope, glory to thee..." this excessively bright Light gradually and in a peaceful way started diminishing, disappearing completely and everything came back to normal.

At that point, the priest noticed a mother who was holding a four-year-old child in her arms entering late. She came in and apologized:

- I am sorry, father, I was late in bringing my child. Besides, what Light was that inside the Church? Were there any spotlights on inside? What powerful Light it was more powerful than the sun!"

- What Light are you talking about, poor thing? Have you lost your mind? He answered.

- Have I lost my mind, father, says the mother. For my small child also saw it. Is it not right, my little Alex, did you not also see the Light?

- Yes, mummy, yes, mummy, lots of Light. I saw it!

After six, approximately seven years, a woman came for Confession for the first time. When she finished confessing she told me the following: When my son Alex was about four years old, on a Saturday morning, I took him to my old neighborhood's Church for Holy Communion. Outside it was raining slightly and I was late to Church. I entered the Church portico and in a state of astonishment, I noticed that the whole Church was so bright that you were under the impression that there were one hundred spotlights. I wondered and murmured by telling my son: "It seems that the priest is testing very strong spotlights".

I lit the candles and entered the Nave. The Priest was reading the Dismissal prayers and this marvelous supernatural Light started disappearing slowly. I asked the Priest what kind of Light that was and he told me that there was not any Light only in my fantasy.

- But, father, she said, both my small child and I saw it. It was a marvelous, exquisite and brighter than the sun Light. Truly, was it God's?

I avoided giving a direct response, for reasons of prudence... however, she verified the Priest's story...

Today's miracles many times confirm the Saints' praiseworthy liturgical experiences as they are being described in the Gerondikon and the Synaxarion.[1]

"We have seen the true light..."

By revealing the experiences from his holy life, **Saint Gregory Palamas** talks about man's entering and communion with a realm of Light. Christ is the "incomparable and exceptional miracle, who is united with human hypostases and souls, co-involving Himself with every faithful person through the Eucharist of His Holy Body.

Becoming one body with us - "of one body' - He thus makes us church dwellings of the entire Divinity, for in Christ's Body "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead, bodily".[2] How then will He not illuminate with the divine radiance of His Body that is within us, the souls of those who receive Holy Communion worthily, just as He once illuminated the bodies of His Disciples on mount Tabor? Moreover, since His holy Body, the source of the light of Grace, during that time had not yet been united with our body, those who were worthy of coming near Him, were illuminated externally and the light was being sent inside their souls through their sensorial eyes. Nevertheless, because He united himself with us and dwells in us He now brightens our soul excessively within".[3]

"We have seen the true Light...", meaning Christ!
"We have received the Heavenly Spirit", the Holy Spirit that is!
"We have found the true Faith", the undivided Trinity, the worship of the one Triune God.
This worship and faith towards our all-holy Triune God, is THE FAITH that saved us. **"Who hath saved us"**.

While the triumphant doxology **"We have seen the true Light..."** is being chanted by our holy chanters, the priest returns to the Holy Altar Table, places the holy Cup upon the Holy Prothesis - on the unfolded Antiminsion - and censes it as he says thrice with extreme reverence: **"Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens and Thy glory above all earth"**. This is said after the deacon has urged the priest - if there is a deacon who is serving the liturgy - who tells him **"Exalt, Master"**. In other words, exalt the holy Cup and thus declare our Christ's glorious Ascension.

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Col. 2,9

[3] Saint Gregory Palamas, G.C.F. 2,231

"Be thoo exalted, O God, above the heavens and thy Glory above all the earth". May you come back, my God, and return to the Throne of Your Glory, where from you also descended for our salvation. As Your glory is spread throughout the heavens like wise may It reign above all the earth and people.

Now we also see Him in His glorious Ascension, being lifted up to the heavens, in order to sit "on the right hand of God"[1] the Father. From up high He is calling us to follow Him and be codwellers with the Angels and Archangels and with all the Saints! To be "co-dwellers" of His heavenly and everlasting Kingdom and all this is realized through the Divine Liturgy.

This is why we must and ought to attend Church services in a fitting and spiritual manner. That is to say, to partake of the catholic Mystery of Holy Eucharist and Worship in a real way

When Christians come to Church on Sundays and feast days, they need not do it only out of religious or social obligation - or even out of habit - but take live part in all that which is being served in the Divine Liturgy. We must all, clergy and laity, live all the events of the divine Drama, the Sacrifice on Golgotha, our redemption with Christ's Resurrection, His divine Ascension and Pentecost; for this is what we assure, when we chant triumphantly: **"we have received the Heavenly Spirit"**!

We ought to receive the offering and redemption from our God-Man and Lord Jesus Christ's Sacrifice, while all of us - clergy and laity- should offer God everything, as "sacrifice acceptable to God".

If we do not have such affluent emotional experiences in the Divine Liturgy, it is because we lack the Divine Liturgy outside the Church! Whatever it is we attain from the Divine Liturgy, we do not carry it with us! (Maybe we do not impart anything externally because we have not gotten anything.)

The faithful Orthodox Christian who attends the liturgy with a sense of awareness, who regularly partakes of the immaculate Mysteries, who is in a state of repentance and sheds streams of tears, his whole life inside the Church and outside it, is sanctified and being transformed into a life that is both divine and human. He imparts any blessing he receives. He gives away any grace he has been granted making his life also outside the Church liturgical.

After the Celebrant priest has censed the holy Cup by saying thrice "Be thou exalted, O God, above the Heavens..." and at the end of the triumphant hymn "we have seen the true light...", he once again takes the holy Cup in his hands, saying inaudibly **"Blessed is our God"**. Then he turns to face the people and as he elevates the holy Cup, he proclaims aloud: **"Always, now and ever and unto ages of ages"**.

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[1] Mark 16,19

At this point, the chanters - monks on Mount Athos melodically chant: **"Amen, amen, amen. For the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting".** Then: **"Fill our mouth with praise Lord, so that we may exalt Thy glory, for Thou has made us worthy of partaking of Thy holy mysteries. Keep us in Thy holiness as we may meditate all day Thy righteousness. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia".**

"Blessed is our God", which the priest says inaudibly, was added later on. Aloud, however, indicating the holy Cup the priest says:

♦ "ALWAYS, NOW AND EVER, AND UNTO AGES OF AGES".

What does this proclamation want to tell us?

"Always, now and ever..." is a continuation of the Lord's words of assurance towards His Disciples, during Great and Holy Thursday night when He offered them, when he delivered to them the consecrated Cup saying: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom".[1] That is to say, Christ assured His Disciples that He shall never drink of this wine of the earthly vine, until that day, following His Second Coming, when He will be rejoicing as He will be drinking it with them eternally and endlessly, anew and even more joyful in His Father's Kingdom.

What does this mean? Those who have been baptized Orthodox Christians also constitute the Body of the Church of the Lord. Therefore, all these people are united with Him in this present life through the Mystery of Holy Communion. However, after His Second Coming, they shall be uniting with our Lord Jesus Christ, as they will be seeing Him Face to face and enjoying in a perceptible and blessed way the co-union with Him into one Body, one Communion!

In a few words: May the Lord deem us worthy of partaking Him **"Always, now and ever..."**, both now, in our present life mysteriologically, but also in the ages of ages to come, united and reigning together with Him in His heavenly Kingdom.

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[1] Mat. 26,29

11. SUPPLICATIONS FOLLOWING HOLY COMMUNION AND THANKSGIVING PRAYER

The priest or deacon immediately says aloud (as if he were giving a command): **"Stand upright. Having partaken of the divine, holy, immaculate, immortal, heavenly, life-giving and dread mysteries of Christ, let us worthily give thanks unto the Lord"**.

● **"Stand upright"**. Why should we stand up? Those who have been communed immediately return to their seats and sit in total silence and as they are immersed in prayer, doxology and thanksgiving, they enjoy the affluent gifts of Holy Communion. Since ancient times, because Holy Communion took a very long time, when Christians used to return to their seats they would sit in an orderly and peaceful manner waiting for the completion of Holy Communion in total SILENCE. Upon the priest's command **"stand upright"**, they would stand up.

We are constantly being spiritually bombarded one after the other by the adjectives following the priest's exclamation, "Stand upright", which tell us that the Mysteries that we have partaken a while ago:

- Are **Divine** not human.
- Are **Holy** not corrupt.
- Are **Immaculate** not filthy.
- Are **Immortal** for they provide a life of immortality.
- Are **heavenly** not earthly, for they do not originate from earth, but from the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Are **life-giving** for they provide and grant life eternal.
- Are also **dreadful**...One cannot play with these. For you get burnt! "For our God is a consuming fire".[1]

This exclamation concludes with the words **"let us worthily give thanks unto the Lord"**, which not only means the way God is worthy of, but the way it should be and the way in which we are obliged to give thanks unto Him. There is no other way of reciprocating than by expressing our gratitude towards God for the great benefits and gifts of the dread Mystery of Holy Eucharist.

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[1] Heb. 12,29

Later two petitions, which we have analyzed, follow: **"Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by Thy grace"** and **"Asking that the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless..."**.

Here, a thanksgiving Prayer, which the priests usually say mystically, is inserted. However, if there are many communicants they should say the following prayer aloud: **"We give thanks unto Thee, O Master who lovest mankind, benefactor of our souls, for that Thou hast vouchsafed this day to feed us with Thy heavenly and immortal Mysteries. Make straight our path; establish us all in Thy fear; guard our life; make firm our steps; through the prayers and intercessions of the glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary and of all Thy Saints"**.

Our thanksgiving for the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion continues. This thanksgiving Prayer reminds us of the corresponding thanksgiving prayer of Christ's Disciples at the end of the Mystical Supper. "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives".[1] Before the Lord gave His Disciples His holy Body, He gave thanks so that we also may in turn give thanks; and after granting It to them, He once again gave thanks and praised, so that we may also do the same.

The hearts of those who have partaken of our Church's Mystical Feast are made warmer by divine Love, which they received within them. **Saint Dionysius the Areopagite** writes, "With the holy initiation of divine Mysteries, those who are initiated will get to know the enormous graces of these Mysteries well and while they will be giving reverently profound thought to their such divine height and extent, they shall praise the divine Godhead's most heavenly good works with gratitude."[2]

May all of us be strengthened in Thy holy Fear Lord. May you shelter us under the wings of Thy divine love. For You are our fortress, our shelter, our establishment, our safeguard. **"Make firm our steps"**. Lord, we ask for all this through the intercessions, the prayers and supplications of Your All-Immaculate Mother, the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos and of all the Saints. For, our All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos but also all the Saints are already in the safe port of the Triumphant Church and constantly pray for us all who strive and are in peril down here in the stormy sea of this present life.

The only thing that is demanded of us is appropriate preparation, repentance and cleanliness, knowledge and action of faith, sensing our sinfulness and unworthiness and our contrition. The only thing however that hinders us are merely our passions, weaknesses, and nothing more.

Our age is sterile. We are more words than deeds. Our brain is full of knowledge and secular wisdom, but our actions lack Grace and God's spe-

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[1] Mat. 26,30

[2] St. Dionysius Areopagite, P.G. 3,445B,C

cial blessing. Of course, our self, with its weaknesses and bad inheritance, is the first one to fight us. The devil also fights us. Nevertheless, what are we to do? Evil shall be conquered through goodness. Our thoughts shall be "vaccinated" with the Grace and blessing received in the Divine Liturgy. In addition, our evil, shameful, filthy, distorted and blasphemous thoughts shall be converted, changed, processed, into good, decent and heavenly thoughts.

Cultivation must first take place within our soul. The living experience will be the one to be revealed on the outside. For today's world does not lack in knowledge, it lacks in true Christian life experience. We must be able to see the true Light with the eyes of our soul every time we come to Church, to God's Temple. **Holy Martyr Iakovos (James) the Hagiorite's** (whom we commemorate on November 1) testimony, the way he narrated it to his disciple Markianos, constitutes a living testimony of faith in all that which is being served during the Divine Liturgy:

196. Iakovos the Priest, who later became a Holy Martyr, once after he had taken kairos, in other words said the entrance prayers prior to the Divine Liturgy, entered the Holy Altar in order to put on his vestments and serve the Divine Liturgy. He then came into a state of amazement and contemplation and with the eyes of his soul he saw the following:

When he began putting on his priestly robe, an extremely bright white Light, just like pure dawn that precedes sunrise, stood before him. It was - he says - the light of Angels. Wherever this Celebrant priest would go the Light beyond this world would follow him.

As soon as he started the Proskomedia of the Holy Gifts, that is to say, the preparation of the Holy Gifts on the Holy Prothesis, the Church was filled with Angels, who split into four big groups, four Orders each of which stood at the Church's four corners... while one separate multitude of Angels was serving the Holy Altar...

Towards the end of the Proskomedia, he covered the Holy Gifts with the holy covers, which were immediately overshadowed by a rich, immensely white, noetic Light. For, according to our Church's teaching, the covers, apart from the Divine Infant's swaddling cloths also reveal the noetic Light of holy Transfiguration. This super glowing Light remained on the Holy Prothesis until the Great Entrance.

When it was time for the Great Entrance he took the "Holies" in his hands, in order to realize It, and as he was exiting the northern Gate, this lovely noetic Light covered his whole being and the Holy Gifts in fact It was preceding... As he was moving inside the Church in a circular movement, this Light also covered the whole congregation in a noetic, inconceivable way...

When he returned to the Holy Altar placing the Precious Gifts on the Holy Table, this super bright noetic Light surrounded it just like the

bright ring around the moon. He was amidst this uncreated Light with the Holy Gifts. In the outer surface of this extremely strange bright circle, there was a multitude of Angels standing with great reverence, without having the boldness to come nearer. These are the mysteries "that the Angels yearn to lean forward to" but do not have the boldness to do so.

His countenance and vestments became all-Light; in fact, continuous lightning of divine Light was coming out of his mouth, when he read the Gospel and recited the liturgical Prayers. Similar lightnings of divine Light were also coming out of his fingers when he was blessing the people. And following the Consecration of Holy Gifts, the most awesome of all was that he saw the Lord sitting as an Infant on the holy Diskos, amidst a Light that was brighter than the sun...

A many-eyed Light!

An immensely bright, unsetting and unwaning Light!

A lovely, most sweet and everlasting Light!

A peace-giving, uncreated and all-shining Light!

As he divided the Lamb into four parts IC-XC-NI-KA, he saw His Holy Blood being poured inside the holy Cup, from which the congregation and he received Holy Communion. Moreover, following the words "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens..." he saw the divine Infant intact who together with the Angelic hosts was ascending the heavens in immense glory".[1]

This was Holymartyr Iakovos' contemplation and divine ecstasy, in relationship with that which is served in the Divine Liturgy that is also our Holy God's living work of Providence, which is repeated from Great and Holy Thursday until today. Such spiritual experiences are lived under special circumstances of holiness and cleanliness on the part of the celebrant and the churchgoers. There exists a multitude of testimonies for those who are doubtful and of little faith.

Following the priest's proclamations,

- **"Stand upright. Having partaken of the divine, holy..."**
- **"Help us; save us; have mercy..."**
- **"Asking that the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful, etc".**

The Thanksgiving Prayer that concludes with the exclamation, which refers to the Trinity follows: **"For Thou art our Sanctification, and unto Thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".**

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[1] Laghis Matthew, *The great Synaxaristis*..., ibid, vol. 11, 1984[5], p.30

I wonder what our life's aim is?
Why have we come to earth?

The god - inspired teaching of the Holy Scripture and our Lord's divine word tell us that our life's aim is sanctification. That is, cast away the old person and thereafter establish a new one. We must separate ourselves from malice, pride, wickedness and selfishness. In one single word, separate ourselves from sin. Afterwards, we should be released from the tyranny of the devil and the fear of death. In this way, we shall be able to live a life, acceptable to Christ and His Gospel. As a blessed result, we shall become citizens of Heaven.

Nevertheless, is this something easy to do? Of course, it is not! This is why we address our Lord and Savior and say:

- "Christ, help us to separate ourselves from sin, cast away every malice and thus be filled with Your holiness.
- No one else but YOU is able to cleanse us and make us holy vessels of Your Grace.
- You are our sanctification, for You are the only Holy One and the only fountain of holiness.
- The Theotokos Maria became All-Holy (Panagia) from You. All the Saints who adorn Your Church and heaven are Yours, for You sanctified them.
- You actually make Your Angels pure and clean, like flames of fire.
- You, the only One Holy without sin, Lord make all of us worthy of partaking of the immaculate Mysteries, which are "Holy" and are fit for those who are "holy". Therefore, with the same heavenly divine Nourishment You also feed us, as well as all Your Saints.
- You, Lord, are the One Who sanctifies the Holy Gifts. You, are the One Who makes them through Your All-Holy Spirit the fountain of sanctification.
- And if You do not establish us in Your fear, and if You do not safeguard our life, and if You do not preserve the gifts and talents that You granted us through Holy Communion..., how then are we to preserve the sanctification of Your all-immaculate divine Mysteries within our souls?
- This is why; we beseech You to grant us everything. You are the sanctification of our souls and bodies! ..."[1]

Nonetheless, what do we offer God, Who grants us everything? We offer Him our good disposition, our intention. Every day we must cry out continually in a spirit of humility, "I want to be saved. I want to become a man of God. To become Your own child... to receive the adoption."

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[1] Trembelas Panaghiotis, *Our Orthodox Worship*, Athens 1991, p.387

While the last petitions together with the Thanksgiving Prayer and the exclamation **"For Thou art our Sanctification..."** are being said, the Celebrant Priest "consumes the Holies". That is to say, he places the remaining portions into the holy Cup - the portions in memory of the Theotokos and of the nine Orders of the Saints together with all the crumbs, which represent the souls of the living and the departed. The priest gathers everything with the 'Mousa' and throws it inside the holy Cup saying: **"By Thy Precious Blood, O Lord, wash away the sins of Thy servants here commemorated, through the intercessions of Thine all-Immaculate Mother and of all Thy Saints. Amen".**

As both Triumphant and Militant Church were on the holy Diskos, they are now united with our Lord Jesus Christ's all-holy Blood together with the multitude of names, of the living and the departed, who were commemorated in the Divine Liturgy (at the Holy Prothesis, the Ectenia and the Diptychs following the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts). The Celebrant Priest is supplicating with his whole heart so that the sins of all those may be washed away by our Lord's Precious Blood in the holy Cup. In this way, our souls are made powerful and are illuminated in their striving against passions and demons. Thus, the requirements for redemption and salvation are increased.

12. THE PRAYER BEHIND THE AMVON

"Let us depart in peace. Let us pray to the Lord", the priest continues and the congregation through the holy chanters responds: **"Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Holy Father, bless"**.

The Divine Liturgy is a journey. A journey, whose aim and ending is our reunion with Lord the Savior, our co-journey up to Golgotha and our union with Him through Holy Communion. This aim has already been fulfilled. We have reached the end of our journey. We have seen the true Light. We have witnessed the Lord Transfigured. All full of Glory on Mount Tabor. We have gone through His Passion and His Resurrection from the dead. We have also witnessed His Holy Ascension. **"We have seen the true Light..."**. We have enjoyed the flames of Pentecost when we chanted **"we have received the Heavenly Spirit"** and most importantly, we have partaken of His All-Holy Body and His Precious Blood.

Therefore, what we receive through Divine Worship and Communion of the immaculate Mysteries, that is, joy, peace, gentleness, the good transformation, love, gladness, calmness, forbearance, faith, hope, goodness, propriety and so many other gifts "of which there are no number", we carry them home and to our family, to our occupation and to our whole life. We are the witnesses of the new life in Christ, the good witnesses in the world and amongst people with reverence, consistency, revengelessness, with love, fear of God and goodwill.

After the Divine Liturgy and especially Holy Communion, people wish to see that we are sweet, gentle, kind, cheery, illuminated, that we are bearers of the Holy Spirit! (We should also take joy in seeing others this way. We should make use of their gladness and be joyful as well. We should make use of their own gentleness and sweetness and also be made peaceful. (This is why I say that every time there is a sense of agitation after Holy Communion this indicates that we have not truly received Holy Communion). This is why we are obliged to strive enormously in order to keep the divine Light that we have received burning. We have received gifts from the Divine Liturgy, yet how are we to guard them? This can be made possible only through humility and lots of prayer, through patience, faith and spiritual forcefulness, through watchfulness and prudence.

The commandment says, "Hold that fast which thou hast".[1] Hold fast to what Christ has granted you through Divine Worship and His evangelical word, guard it, it is a holy trust! Whatever it is you can give from what has been granted to you that can be profitable to your brother, go ahead and give.

♦ "LET US DEPART IN PEACE"

Those who lay all the cares of this life outside the Church and surrender wholeheartedly to God's Worship, they are the ones who easily perceive the meaning of this liturgical exhortation.

This is true! How are they to bring their mind, which was flying in the fragrant atmosphere of heaven, down to earth? How will they separate from doxological worship, the spiritual Table and the all-holy Sanctuary, so that they may once again fall into the maelstrom and turmoil of this world? Let us not worry! Mother Church has taken care of this.

Prior to Dismissal, the Prayer behind the Amvon grants many wishes and blessings that aim at establishing us, for the Church wishes to guard her children! In addition, she wishes that they might depart, as powerful and at the same time as benefited as possible. We must bring Christ Whom we have received, to the world. This is why we are in need of this ultimate blessing.

What might this blessing be? It is the **Prayer Behind the Amvon**. It is called this way for in the ancient Church since the amvon was situated at the centre the priest used to stand behind the amvon in order to say this Prayer. Now, the amvon is situated differently, thus, the Priest says the Prayer outside the Holy Altar standing before the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was in fact included in the Divine Liturgy around the 7th century.

Nowadays, on Mount Athos the Celebrant starts saying the Prayer inside the Holy Altar and by uttering the phrase: **"O God, save thy people and bless thine inheritance"** he then exits the Holy Altar, blesses the people with his right hand and continues saying the Prayer standing before the icon of Christ on the iconostasis.

The Prayer Behind the Amvon says the following:

"O Lord, Who blessest those who bless Thee and sanctifiest those who put their trust in Thee: Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance, preserve the fulness of Thy Church, sanctify those who love the beauty of Thy house, glorify them in recompense by Thy divine power, and forsake us not who hope on Thee. Give peace to Thy world, to Thy Churches, to the priests, to the civil authorities, to the armed forces and to all Thy people; for all good giving and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from Thee, the Father of lights, and unto Thee

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[1] Apoc. 3,11

we ascribe glory, thanksgiving and worship to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".

The people: **"Amen"**.

During the first centuries the Divine Liturgy would end with the deacon's exhortation **"let us depart in peace"**, (they did not use to say "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers..."). This phrase would indicate the end of the Divine Liturgy and the dismissal of the faithful.

It is indeed typical that in the **Liturgy of Saint James the Brother of God** the corresponding phrase is, **"Let us go in Christ's peace"** next the phrase **"you are dismissed in peace"** is said thrice. "You are dismissed in peace" is the equivalent to "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen", said today.

The first sentence in the Prayer says: **"O Lord, Who blessest those who bless Thee ...and bless Thine inheritance"**. Here the verb "bless" is repeated three times. Of course, the way Christians bless differs from the way God blesses. In this particular sentence God blesses those who bless Him: **"Who blessest those who bless Thee"**.

This means that we are the ones who bless God, when we praise, exalt and glorify His all-honorable and majestic Name. However, when God is the One Who blesses, it reveals that He affluently pours out in our hearts the infinite gifts of His All-Holy Spirit. And if all of us are to receive them, we are then filled with spiritual and divine richness, with holiness, grace, peace and blessedness...

If God's blessings, which stem from within the Divine Worship and the holy Cup, are to bear fruit in our souls, they shall convert us into God's blessed children. Through these blessings the ascetics and faithful, striving Christians were made praiseworthy and glorious in the heavenly world of the Angels. Heaven is the one that witnesses the faithful children of the Militant Church as brightly fashioned children of divine Light.

"Preserve the fulness of Thy Church".

"Pliroma" (the Greek word for fulness) is the group of people on board a ship that travels. It includes the captain, the sailors and the passengers. The Church resembles a ship (this is how it was depicted in the Catacombs) whose crew is the clergy and laity. The clergy is the one who in the name of Jesus Christ serves the Mysteries and shepherds the people of God, and thus the people are being shepherded and led to the spiritual sheepfold of the Kingdom of Heaven.

According to **Hippolytus**, "the world is an ocean in which (world) the Church like a ship in the sea is troubled by bad weather, yet she does not get lost. For, Christ Who is an experienced captain is with her; in the center,

she bears the sign of victory against death, for she bears the Cross of Christ ...The two Testaments are her helm".[1]

Moreover, we notice that the priest asks God to preserve and sanctify all those who love **"the beauty of Thy house"**, for beauty, order and decency make a great contribution so that God's most holy Name may be glorified.

"Glorify them in recompense by Thy divine power...". Lord, those who bless You, glorify You and honor You, with their works of faith, their confession, and their words, may You also glorify them in recompense with Your divine Omnipotence. **"Save..., sanctify..., preserve..., glorify... and bless Thy people, O Lord"**!

Furthermore, the priest prays for the peace "of the whole world", for peace in the Church's bosom, so that she may not be troubled by heresies and divisions in her body. Also for peace in the affairs between all the clergy of every rank, for Christians' consciences are easily shaken.

Finally, he prays for the army and the country's civil authorities, so that God may illuminate them in every peaceful and good deed they undertake for the benefit of the Church and her people.

"For all good giving and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from Thee, the Father of Lights". This excerpt from the Prayer behind the Amvon has been taken from Saint James the Brother of Christ. All the gifts and the multitude of talents we receive, not only from the Divine Liturgy and the Mysteries of our Church, but also every good thing in our life are the gifts of the Father of Lights, of God the Father.

197. The Divine Liturgy's unapproachable magnificence, heavenly gifts and inconceivable mysteries are described by Saint Nephon, Bishop of Konstantianis, in a unique way.

This Saint, who lived approximately during the 4th century A.D., was deemed worthy, by the Holy Spirit to have a great number of experiences that involved spiritual contemplation and divine visions with the eyes of his soul.

Once, during the Divine Liturgy, as the priest was saying "Blessed is the Kingdom...", he saw holy lightning and fire coming down from heaven and overshadowing the holy Altar and the Celebrant priest, without him realizing anything.

Later, when the holy chanters together with the faithful began chanting the Thrice Holy hymn, four Angels descended and chanted along with them.

During the Apostolic reading, the First Chief Apostle Paul appea-

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[1] Hippolytus, LIX, L.G.F.C.A. 6, p.217-218

red who was guiding the reader. While the chanters were slowly chanting "alleluia" following the Apostolic reading, the voices of the people were rising up in the heavens like a burning tightly knit rope. In fact, during the Gospel reading, the priest's words were coming out his mouth like burning flames.

Shortly prior to the Great Entrance of the Holy Gifts, Saint Nephon suddenly sees the heavens opening up and at the same time, a most joyful sweet-scented fragrance out of this world was being poured out inside the entire Church. Angels were descending from above chanting hymns and doxologies to the Lamb and our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, "Who takest away the sins of the world".

Then all unexpectedly a most pure, all white and brighter than the sun sweetest Infant, Who was carried by the Angels and Archangels was placed on the holy Diskos, where the Holy Gifts had also been placed. Actually, all around Him there gathered a multitude of brightly clothed young men, who were illuminated by His beaming divine beauty.

After the Celebrant Priest had censed the Holy Table he approached to take hold of the Holy Gifts (the holy Diskos and holy Cup). As he elevated them, the Holy Infant was at the same time being elevated and placed on his head. Two Cherubim and two Seraphim were ahead and a multitude of Angels followed as they were chanting ineffable melodies with gladness.

As soon as the priest put the Holy Gifts with the Holy Infant on the Holy Altar, the multitude of Angels immediately covered it with their wings. The two Cherubim stood on the right hand of the priest and two Seraphim on the left. However, the Celebrant could not see anything of what the Saint's eyes of his soul saw.

Afterwards the petitions of the Litany of Supplication were intoned and the whole Symbol of Faith "I believe in One God..." was recited like a thunderous sound by the assembly of faithful and the multitude of Angels.

The dreadful moment of the Consecration of Holy Gifts had finally come. The Celebrant blessed them by saying: "changing them by Thy Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen". Then Saint Nephon saw an Angel slaughtering the Holy Infant with a knife! In fact, His all-holy Blood was being poured inside the holy Cup while His all-pure Body was being cut in a mystical way and placed in the sublime Diskos! Of course, the Angel would later stand beside It with great reverence and holy awe.

The Divine Liturgy continued and at the moment when the Celebrant Priest elevated the Holy Bread proclaiming "Let us attend; the Holy Things are for the holy" and the faithful in one body was chanting "One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen", one of the Christians who was in the Church standing beside Saint Nephon, asked him in a low voice:

- Why, my father, does the priest say: The Holy Things are for the holy?

- Because he is addressing all of us, my child, so it is as if he is telling us: Whoever is holy, may he draw near to receive Holy Communion.

And then he asked once again:

- And what is holiness?

- Well, my child if you have all kinds of falls of the flesh and you have not confessed them with a contrite heart and true repentance and moreover you do not have your Spiritual Father's permission to partake of Holy Communion, do not draw near this most awesome Mystery, for "Fire art Thou which burneth the unworthy". Then again, if you have feelings of enmity and malice towards your neighbor or if you have accused someone falsely, do not draw near Christ's Holy Members. If you condemn and you are ironic towards your neighbor and most of all if you curse the Holy things, do not dare to partake of the immaculate Mysteries. If you are virtuous and follow the evangelical commandments, then you may draw near the holy Cup. If, however, after you have examined yourself, you discover that you have been corrupted by sin and that you are unrepentant, do not draw near... go away... repent profoundly and truly and go for confession."

Then the Celebrant intones:

- "With fear of God and faith and love, draw near".

Saint Nephon was now observing those who were being communed: as soon as they partook of the Body and Blood of Christ some of the faces were as dark as tar and other ones were as bright as the sun. The Saint sighed in pain when he saw this dissimilarity...

The Angels were attending Holy Communion invisibly and in awe. When a reverent person would receive Holy Communion, they would place an extremely bright crown on his head. When, however, an unreasonable unrepentant sinful person would draw near, then the Angels would turn their countenances away from him. The unfortunate would partake of shame and depart with a completely dark face.

Following the Holy Communion of the faithful, the hymns and the two Prayers, the Divine Liturgy ended. The Antidoron (holy bread) was distributed and the priest read the Dismissal prayers.

After Dismissal the Holy Infant alive and safe appeared once again in the Cherubims' supine open palms, which lifted Him in the heavens with myriads of supercelestial chants and praises, in exactly the same way He was brought down.

Saint Nephon saw and enjoyed during the Divine Liturgy all these things that are incomprehensible and unapproachable to the human mind.[1]

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[1] Peter Hieromonk, *An ascetic Bishop*, Astir publications[2], p.149

♦ "BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD, HENCEFORTH AND FOREVERMORE".

This final doxology of God's all-holy Name is taken from the **112th Psalm** (verse 2). It is also Righteous Job's doxological reference towards God.

Job was a figure in the Old Testament, "blameless, righteous, and godly, abstaining from everything evil...", [1] as Christ Himself testifies. We are all aware of his story. Many calamities befell him. Job of course must have hurt more for the tragic death of his ten children, seven boys and three girls, when very strong winds blew his house down and fell upon them, the moment when they were eating together in a brotherly manner. In fact, his children were pious! They were not bad children with bad unethical behavior. They were good, devout and righteous, like their father. When the messenger announced his children's death, he did not speak bitterly, he did not murmur against God, but he gave glory to God by saying: "Blessed be the name of the Lord".[2]

Therefore, no matter how much sorrow and temptation befall all of us young and old the more we should praise the Lord. It is a difficult thing to do but we must do it. If we bless the Lord for our personal storms how much more ought we to glorify Him for His utmost sacrifice on the Cross, whose saving fruits we savor in the Divine Liturgy? This is why we chant, "Blessed be the Name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore".

While the chanters chant **"Blessed be the Name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore"** the priest enters the sanctuary and goes directly to the Holy Prothesis, where the holy Cup is now placed, and says the following prayer in a low voice: **"O Christ our God, who art thyself the Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, who didst fulfill all the dispensation of the Father: Fill our hearts with joy and gladness, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen"**.

Our Christ and God, You Who are the fulfillment of (the Mosaic) Law and of (the preaching) of the Prophets, You Who have realized Your Father's entire plan (for the salvation of the world), fill our hearts with joy and gladness, now and ever and to the never-ending ages of ages. Amen.

It is the fourth Prayer in the Divine Liturgy, which addresses Jesus Christ.

We immediately proceed to the **Dismissal** and the **Antidoron**.

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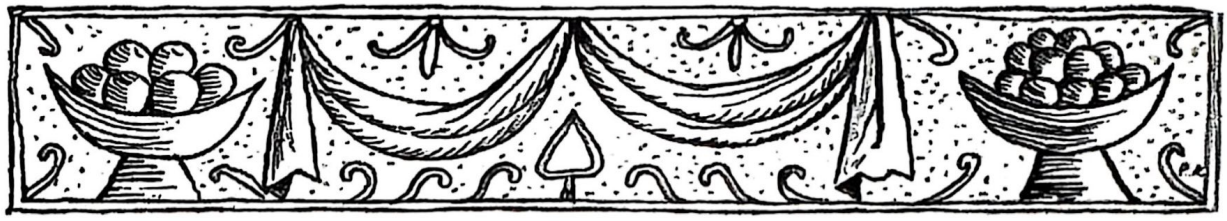
[1] Job 1,1 [2] Job 1,21



13. DISMISSAL AND ANTIDORON

After the mystical Prayer "The Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets..." the Celebrant for the last time invites the faithful to pray: **"Let us pray to the Lord"**. Then he says: **"The blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon you through His Divine Grace and love toward mankind, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages"**.

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas comments on this final Dismissal prayer as follows: The Celebrant Priest prays that the Lord God have mercy on us, so that we may be saved, for we have nothing of our own to present that is worthy of salvation, but we aim exclusively at His love for mankind, which alone is able to save us."[1] This is why he commemorates many intercessor Saints who will help us in our endeavors, and in particular the All-Holy Mother (Panagia) of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, through Which His mercy originally came to us.

The Dismissal continues with the priest saying:
"Glory to Thee, O Christ our God and our Hope, glory to Thee. May Christ, our true God, (Who rose from the dead), through the intercessions of His All-Immaculate and All-Blameless Holy Mother; by the might of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross; by the protection of the Honorable Bodiless Powers of Heaven; at the supplications of the Honorable, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John; of the Holy, Glorious and All-Laudable Apostles; of our father among the saints John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople; (or Basil the Great, revealer of heavenly things when his Divine Liturgy is served); **of the Holy, Glorious and Right-Victorious Martyrs; of our Venerable and God-Bearing Fathers; of the** (patron saint of the church); **of the Holy and Righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; of the curative and wonder workers the Unmercenaries; of the Saint** (of the day) **whose memory we celebrate and of all the Saints; have mercy on us, and save us, forasmuch as he is good and loveth mankind"**

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,489D

The whole worship of God ends with the words **"Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us".**

When we say "Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers..." we do not mean the Saints we mean the living fathers, the living priests, the living clergy, the living Spiritual fathers. Through the prayers of these holy fathers may God have mercy on us.

A last **"Amen"** from the faithful, in other words from the chanters, accompanied by the sign of the Cross, confirms and concludes the whole Divine Worship, Holy Eucharist and Holy Communion. Immediately after the **Antidoron** is distributed.

At the end of the distribution of the Antidoron, the priest enters the Sanctuary and while he consumes the Holy Gifts, and washes his hands and lips, the reader says the Prayers of Thanksgiving. At the end of these prayers, the priest says: **"Now lettest thou thy servant depart...".** This is the phrase of Saint Symeon the God bearer.

Now the Celebrant Priest, as every faithful Christian who worthily partook of the immaculate Mysteries, is prepared to die! This is why he proclaims: **"Now lettest thou thy servant depart... for mine eyes have seen thy salvation",**[1] like Saint Symeon the God bearer, when he held the Savior of the world in his arms for only a few moments. We did not simply hold Him, but partook all of Him within us! Moreover, He granted us salvation and clothed us in incorruption and light, in immortality and life! He raised us up and "made us sit together"[2] and made us sit on the same throne on the right hand of God the Father. And after He "made us sit together" on the right hand of God the Father, deified, there in His Kingdom, the priest takes off his vestments, which means that he no longer needs the robe of this world, as he has been clothed in Christ Himself!

What is the Antidoron?

The Antidoron, as the remaining part of the whole Prosphoron, of which the **LAMB** of God was taken from, represents our All-Holy **(Panagia) Theotokos**. The Antidoron is a small gift, instead of the GIFT, that is offered to those who did not receive Holy Communion. Therefore, with it they are also partaking at the same time of our Most Holy Mother's (Panagia) gifts rich.

Therefore, the Christian congregation ought to remain in the Church until the end of the Divine Liturgy so that they may take the Antidoron from the priest's hand, which they should kiss with reverence, for only in this way they can receive the special Grace from the all-holy Triune God.

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[1] Luk. 2,29-30 [2] Eph. 2,6

As the priest blesses the Antidoron following the Consecration of the Precious Gifts, he says, **"Great is the Name of the Holy Trinity, to those who offered the Holy Gifts and to those for which they were offered".** While he is distributing it to the faithful, he says, **"The blessing of the Lord and His mercy come upon you".**

Those who do not remain in God's Church Temple until the end, so that they may receive the Antidoron as a blessing, sanctification and Grace, as our Church specifies, are very much mistaken! This mistake goes on when the Antidoron is placed on the Church's table for candles.

The **Sacred Nicholas Cabasilas** adds the following: "The bread that is distributed as Antidoron has previously been sanctified, for it has been offered to God. All the Christians who have been to Church receive it with reverence in their right curved palm and kiss the priest's right hand, which a short while ago touched and cut Christ the Savior's most holy Body; for all of it was sanctified. This is why the Church claims that the Celebrant's hand imparts this sanctification to those who touch and kiss it".[1]

The Antidoron should be distributed in silence, while the holy chanters are chanting holy hymns. Chatting should be in whispers, low voiced; as soon as we exit the Church's porch, we exchange greetings and pass on to one another the sanctification and the love we have received.

Usually however, when the Celebrant Priest says "Through the prayers..." and the Antidoron has just started to be distributed, you Christians are noisy. You start a long, never-ending chat.

198. Therefore, one Sunday when the Divine Liturgy had ended, some people "had gone overboard" with all the loud voice and laughter, they were causing.

At that moment, I was distributing Antidoron and my concelebrant was consuming the remaining Holy Gifts. In the Church there were about ten people more or less still waiting to receive the Antidoron.

As one of them was laughing loudly, he suddenly turned his head towards the Holy Altar. He saw me of course distributing the Antidoron, however the Iconostasis in front of him had disappeared. First, his eyes fell on father P., whom he saw elevating the holy Cup, in order to complete the consuming the remaining Holy Gifts, while at the same time he saw the whole Holy Altar filled with Angels, who were standing with reverence, with their hands crossed and their heads bowed, somber as all of them were turned towards the place where the priest was consuming the remaining Holy Gifts. For during that moment the Living God, our Lord's Body and Blood are still in the holy Cup. Two of the Angels turned towards him looking at him with a serious and very austere look. He almost fainted.

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[1] Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, P.G. 150,489C

He stood out-of-the-doors, threw some water on his face so that he could come round, drank one-two glasses of water and left. A week, ten days later he came for Confession. He told me to refer to this incident, without revealing his identity, for he felt enormously ashamed and guilty.

The following Sunday after telling the congregation the incident, when I was distributing the Antidoron, it was as if the Church was empty! There was extreme silence!

And father P. asks me:

- What happened, aren't there any people in the Church? What miracle has imposed this holy silence?[1]

If the Celebrants of the Most High and the congregation sensed and experienced God's wonders and the miracles of Divine Worship, they would then be under the power of great emotion and impact. In addition, when the soul and mind are astonished by the wonders of the Holy Eucharist, then the soul usually remains silent and wonders mystically. The miracle of salvation is realized only with the life and example of conscientious priests and that of faithful Christians, who have been reborn by the divine Mysteries.

♦ "GLORY TO THEE, O CHRIST OUR GOD AND OUR HOPE, GLORY TO THEE".

The interpretation of the Divine Liturgy that was mainly based on the living experiences of holy priests, monks and faithful persons ends with these doxological phrases that mark the end of the Divine Liturgy.

We commenced this task with great hesitation and fear. Imperfections and lack of knowledge existed in many areas. Our unworthiness is assured. Our experiences were insignificant. For, we relied on our Gerondas' and your prayers, which we continue to ask for...We also used a great deal of references.

Thus, starting today every time we partake of the Divine Worship, every time we come to Church, and receive Holy Communion, the words of the book of the **Apocalypse** would be the most appropriate for us: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb".[2]

As the most pitiful levite, I am obligated to repeat with great reverence the words of the much suffering Job:

"Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore".

Amen.

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[1] Personal notes

[2] Apoc. 19,9

PART III

SELECTED PARTS

SELECTED PARTS

Every evening **Vespers** is served in the holy Churches. It is a particular service, which prepares us for next day's Matins and Divine Liturgy. As we enter the empty Church, all is silent, calm and quiet. The empty Church is compared to the world, before it was even created by God. It was a total void. There was only the Eternal God; the Living God Who is present.

However, as the priest enters the Church the creation of the world begins. "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth..."[1] Therefore, they light the candles, vigil lamps and censer. Gradually, the Church is livened up. It is the creation of the material world.

As soon as the priest puts on his stole and 'phelonion' (cape-like priestly vestment), the creation of man is being symbolically depicted, with the first-made divinely woven robe of holiness and sinlessness, of Grace and divine beauty. This is why when, the newly and first-formed man, Adam, first opened his eyes, and saw that he was amidst the infinite font, amidst the infinite Church Temple of the whole world with its endless beauties and divine charm, he proclaimed with a loud voice: **"Bless the Lord, O my soul..."**

Likewise, as the priest commences Vespers, in a loud voice he says, **"Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages"**. Immediately the reader reads the appointed **Proemial Psalm**:**"Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, Thou hast been magnified exceedingly..."**.[2]

With this psalm the psalmist, is lead up to the glory of the pre-eternal God and creator of the whole world. He is the One "Who toucheth the mountains and they smoke". He is the One "Who looketh on the earth and maketh it tremble". I wonder why? Why does He look on the earth? Why does He touch the mountains and they smoke? Why does the earth tremble when He looks on it? Man sinned; the first-formed man disobeyed his God and Creator. For together with Adam and Eve the whole creation fell away and therefore laments. In his lamentation man who has fallen away asks God to have mercy on him. This is why the 140th Psalm is heard next in the Vesper service: **"Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me... Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee..."**[3]

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[1] Gen. 1,1 [2] Psalm 103,1 [3] Psalm 140,1-2

Adam experienced the beauty of the world in Paradise; however, with his fall he also experienced the dreadful ugliness of this world. Yet, the fall gives birth to hope. God promises that the world's Savior, the Redeemer, the Messiah Which He names ("the woman's seed"[1]) will be born by a woman. For thousands of years the Prophets have been continuously talking about the Messiah, the Redeemer Whom we are awaiting... Many times during festal Vespers the Prophets announce though the readihgg this coming of the Redeemer that is for our salvation. In the world of darkness and sin Light has come! Christ has come! The Church chants:

"O gladsome Light of the holy glory of the immortal, heavenly, holy, blessed Father: Jesus Christ..."

Christ is the "gladsome light of the glory of God" who has come to the world! Adam's disobedience, which caused his fall and darkness, is shown by the closing of the Beautiful Gate at the end of Vespers. The candles, vigil lamps and lights are turned off. The priest takes off his vestments. This shows how Adam was bared from the divinely woven robe of immortality and sinlessness. He lost the first created beauty and was filled with darkness. As he was on the other side of Paradise, exiled and mortal "he was lamenting for his own nakedness. Woe to me who was convinced by wicked deception, and was thus moved away from glory..."[2] However, the hope that was then given to the fallen woman was fulfilled. Christ was born "by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary".

The Vesperal Service has three parts:

- the **glory** of creation,
- the **grief** for the fall,
- the **promise** of redemption.

"Orthros" (Matins) begins early in the morning, before sun rise. "And there was evening and there was morning, the first day".[3] During Matins the first lights that are being lit in the Church are candles and vigil lamps. And shortly after, when the sun rises and we have proceeded to the service of Matins, our Church Fathers see in the sunrise another kind of sunrise that of the true Light of the world. The sunrise of the Son of God, of our Savior Jesus Christ is triumphantly chanted:**"Glory to Thee, Who hast shown us the light...".**

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[1] Gen. 3,15

[2] Hymn of Praise of the Sticheron of the Service of Vespers of Cheesefare Sunday

[3] Gen. 1,5

The realization of the promise for the incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ is proclaimed with the **Prothesis**, which is served during Orthros. Everything that took place during the night when Christ was born in Bethlehem, that is, the appearance of the star and the Wise Kings', the Shepherds' and Angels' worship are prefigured in the holy Prothesis.

As the **Divine Eucharist** is synoptically presented, we shall be referring to its major parts which are:

- **First: The definition, the naming and the Holy Conversion.**

The greatest, the highest Mystery of our Church is the Divine Eucharist. It is the Mystery of Mysteries. It is "the most imperial of Mysteries". It is the eternal Mystery whose value is incalculable and enormously great and its place in the Worship of our Church is unique and wonderful. That is to say, the Mystery constitutes the real and bloodless representation of the Lord's Sacrifice on the Cross.

Divine Eucharist is called Divine Worship - this is how we are familiar with it - or Divine Liturgy, Blessing, Love, Holy Communion, Holy Union, Dreadful Mysteries, All-Immaculate Mysteries, Breaking of the Bread, Kyriakon or Mystical Supper, Heavenly Bread, Cup of Life or Holy Cup, Episcopal or Mystical Table, Sacrifice, Holy Anaphora, Holy Offering, Sanctuary, Remedy of Immortality, a Provision for Life Everlasting.

The Conversion of the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is real. It is most certainly supernatural and inconceivable, yet it is real. How does this happen? People's tiny mind cannot comprehend it. Christ is not concealed under the Holy Gifts, He is not hidden in them, He is not beneath, He is not on the top, He is not sideways, He is not somewhere inside. No matter how small the portions on the Holy Spoon are, it is This His actual true Body and this His actual true Blood. They are not mere symbols as the Protestants and many other heretics claim, and most importantly there is not a mere mystical union of our soul with Christ. This means that we eat and drink of the true Body and of the true Blood of God-Man Jesus Christ; the real, the true, the deified, That Which was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. Thus, we become "of one body and of one blood" and Christ bearers and with Christ Whom we partake within us we constitute one Body and one Blood.

From the moment the Holy Spirit descended and the most immaculate Mystery is being ministered, we no longer have what our eyes can see or what our tongue can savor, but we have That Which we believe, That Which we venerate, That Which we worship; we have our Christ's deified Body

and Blood, the true and real One. The reality of the Conversion of the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ are also testified by the Lord's words in the Mystical Supper: "This is my body... for this is my blood".[1]

◆ **Second: The Holy Institution.**

The Mystery of Divine Eucharist was instituted by the Lord Himself on the night of Great and Holy Thursday, in the Mystical Supper when He blessed the Bread and Blood and gave It to His Disciples, "for them to eat and drink", saying to them: "Take, eat; this is My body...drink of It all of you; for this is My blood" and added: "do this in remembrance of Me".[2]

◆ **Third: Signs perceived by the senses.**

The great Mysteries' sensible signs are the bread, the wine and the Consecration Prayer. The bread should be made of pure wheat and leavened bread and the wine of sweet red grapes. The Consecration Prayer is **"That the Holy Spirit may descend upon us and upon these Gifts here spread forth and bless them..."**.

◆ **Fourth: Imparted Grace.**

In the Holy Eucharist it is not only the Grace of Christ that is being imparted as is the case with other Mysteries, but Christ Himself, our Lord. Through the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, the faithful Christian who is worthy of receiving It becomes "of one body and of one blood with Christ".

The embodiment into the Body of the Church begins with Baptism and concludes with our partaking of the Divine Eucharist in the Divine Liturgy. This means that our whole being receives this Life, the Lord and Redeemer, in a mystical way and becomes of one body with Him. We become one with Him. Our members become regenerated, Christ bearers and God bearers.

◆ **Fifth: Divine Eucharist as Sacrifice.**

The Divine Eucharist is not only a Mystery, but also a Sacrifice. It is a true and bloodless representation of the God-Man Jesus Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross on Golgotha. The Lord is still being sacrificed but bloodlessly without blood flowing. In this bloodless Sacrifice Christ Himself is He that Offereth and is Offered, just like on the Holy Cross.

The Divine Eucharist **as Sacrifice** has
a thanksgiving, supplicating and mainly propitiating character.

- As a **thanksgiving Sacrifice** the Lord is offered by the Church for God's innumerable benefits and gifts towards people and in fact for salva-

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[1] Mat. 26,26-28 [2] Luk. 22,19

tion in Christ. Through Sacrifice, we continually offer Him thanksgiving for all His gifts and especially for the salvation and redemption from the devil, death and sin, that was granted to us, through this Sacrifice.

- As a **suppliant Sacrifice**, the Lord is offered by the Church to those who pray and ask for help, mercy, illumination and salvation. Nevertheless, to those who pray with faith through Divine Worship.
- As a **propitiational Sacrifice**, He is offered for the forgiveness of our sins. This is why the Sacrifice is taking place, so that our sins may be forgiven. In a more general sense however, so that the Christians may make themselves the gift of Christ's salvation their own, which is being offered from the Holy Altar Table.

The Sacrifice is moreover propitiational for it is also offered for the departed, for the benefit, spiritual merit and comfort of those who are suffering.

Who makes this gift their own? The Christians do, not the heretics. That is, those who believe wholeheartedly in that which is taught by our Church, who keep the commandments and cultivate the virtues.

◆ **Sixth: The Divine Liturgy: the work of the people of God.**

The Church is the people of God, therefore the Divine Liturgy, as public labor, is done for the people of God, by the people themselves. The priests of the Church do not serve the Divine Liturgy on their own or mystically, but every time the Divine Liturgy is served with the people of God.

When we are inside the Church Temple during the Divine Liturgy, we are not mere spectators to that which is being ministered, but all of us together liturgize and we are being liturgized. That is to say: we, as the people of God, serve the Divine Liturgy, however through the priests and bishops who have received the Grace of Priesthood since their ordination. The Church is the people, the celebrant priest and the holy Altar Table. In other words, the Divine Liturgy!

◆ **Seventh: The communion of the faithful**.

The Divine Liturgy or Holy Eucharist or Divine Worship is not only a Sacrifice or a remembrance and continuation of the Mystical Supper, but it is also a "COMMUNION OF THE FAITHFUL", for we all partake of the same holy Cup. "Communion of the faithful" means that the Church serves the Divine Liturgy and continues the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ bloodlessly so that we may partake of His Body and of His Blood.

When however we say Christ's Sacrifice, we mean two things (we must pay attention to this and always keep it in mind): both His Death on the Cross and His Resurrection on the third day.

We are not present at the Lord's Resurrection.We are nevertheless present in this resurrection; when we partake of Christ's Body and Blood, we not only partake of It **"for the forgiveness of sins but also for life everlasting"**,

The phrase "for life everlasting" is an announcement of our own resurrection, a noetic perception of the resurrection that is to come.

• The **first part** of the Divine Liturgy is **the Service of the Proskomedia** that takes place during Orthros. After the priest has "taken kairos" read the entrance prayers prior to the Divine Liturgy and put on his vestments, he goes towards the Holy Prothesis, in order to do the service of the Proskomedia.

The Holy Prothesis is an apse, which is located on the left of the Holy Table, in the Holy Altar. The apse symbolizes Bethlehem's holy cave, where Christ, the world's Savior was born under extremely humble circumstances.

As the priest is preparing the Prothesis he says the heart-searching troparion of Christmas: "Get ready Bethlehem..." He then takes the prosphoron and elevates it. Every prosphoron (holy bread), every "liturgia", depicts our All-Holy Theotokos (Panagia), from whose womb Christ was born. This is how the Divine Liturgy is prepared.

• The **second part** of the Divine Liturgy begins from **"Blessed is the Kingdom..."** and ends after the Readings, the Ektenia prayer and the Prayer for the Catechumens, and is called the Liturgy of the Catechumens.

• The **third part** of the Divine Liturgy begins with the two Prayers of the Faithful; the Cherubic hymn follows and ends with "Through the prayers..." Thus, it is called the **Liturgy of the Faithful**.

The **first part's central point**, which is the Proskomedia,
is the preparation.
That of the **second part** of the "Liturgy of the Catechumens"
is the Holy Gospel.
The **central point of the third part**, which is the "Liturgy of the faithful", is the Holy Cup.

"Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".

This exclamation is the miracle of our faith. We draw attention to its three points:

• **First:** With the words **"Blessed is the Kingdom..."** the Celebrant priest elevates the Gospel book making with it the sign of the Cross over

the Holy Table and particularly over the folded Antiminsion.

• **Second:** With the words **"Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Sprit..."** what is revealed, made known to us is that the work of Divine Dispensation is the work of all the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, Whose Beginning and Kingdon is ONE!

This triune exclamation presents the ONE God in three Hypostases. This is our faith's basic definition, which we should all be aware of; that God is One, but is distinguished in three Persons and each Person - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is All God and not part of Divinity.

- All-God the Father
- All-God the Son
- All-God the Holy Spirit.

God is a Monad according to the unified and undivided Essence. However, He is also Triune as far as the Persons and Hypostases are concerned. One Hypostasis is distinguished from the other, just like one Person from the other. Nevertheless, also, the three Persons of Divinity are inseparable and undivided and have the same Essence, Nature and Energy.

• The **third** important point of exclamation **"Blessed is the Kingdom..."** is that we praise, bless and glorify the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit with all our psychosomatic energy. That is to say, we express our wonder, our spiritual worship and love for the Kingdom of the Triune God.

When the exclamation "Blessed is the Kingdom..." ends the faithful through the holy chanters respond by saying **"Amen"**.

When **"amen"** is at the beginning and is actually said twice - "amen, amen I say to you..." - it means that what is to be heard is true and certain! Nevertheless, when **"amen"** is said at the end, it might be certain, but most frequently it expresses a wish. It is as if we say: "May it be realized". In the past all the faithful together would say "amen" and it gave you the impression that it was a rumble.

After the Enarxis, which commences with the words "Blessed is the Kingdom..." and "Amen", the **Great Litany**, the so-called **"Litany of Peace"** follows. They include all the petitions that deal with the whole of man's life and especially peace that is manifold. It is the Church's first appearance before God with man's earthly needs and life's circumstances, for we are not only made of spirit but of flesh as well. And we have numerous needs.

"In peace, let us pray to the Lord". That is to say: in peace let us ask of the Lord. The way that leads to the Divine Liturgy and to Divine Worship is the peace of our soul. Without peace we are not able to attend the liturgy; let alone receive Holy Communion. We gain the peace that Christ brought to

the world with His incarnation through repentance. For repentance is man's turning back to Christ, which is at the same time the peace of the soul.

The faithful through the holy chanters respond, **"Lord, have mercy"**, to each petition. This is our Church's most brief, condensed and concise prayer, which says everything. It does wonders.

"Lord, have mercy" indicates three things:

- **First:** that the worship of God is realized not only by the Celebrant priest, but also by the mandatory presence of the faithful, even if there is only one faithful person. This one person represents all the faithful.
- **Second:** we confess that we receive all the goods we are in need of, whether earthly or heavenly, freely from God.
- **And third:** we are in need of His divine mercy in order to be saved. Without God's mercy, there is no salvation. And MERCY comes with REPENTANCE.

Our Church next asks for peace, which originates in our Heavenly Father's tenderheartedness, and for the salvation of our soul. Later, the Celebrant priest asks God for world peace, for the good estate of local Churches and the union of all people with their common faith towards Christ and His Church.

Immediately after, he asks God to protect the Church Temple, where we are attending the liturgy, as every other Orthodox Church Temple, and all those Christians, who enter therein with faith, reverence and the fear of God.

In the following prayer, he supplicates the Lord to protect and illuminate the town's bishop, the presbyter priests, the deacons, all the clergy of the Orthodox Church and the faithful people. This precisely declares the unity of the Church.

Furthermore, he asks God to protect the city or village or island, we dwell therein, but also every city and country. He also prays for all the faithful Orthodox Christians who dwell therein.

Immediately he asks for God's blessing through Divine Worship for whatever the earth needs in order to bear fruit: healthful seasons, beneficent winds and the right amount of rain.

He then asks God to also protect and save the Christians who travel by sea, by land and by air. In addition, he prays for the sick, the afflicted and weary, the captives, those who are in prison, who are missing and thereafter, that is to say, for all those who are away from us and thus are not present in the Divine Liturgy by necessity.

In the following petition, the priest asks God to redeem us from His "wrath of justice", which will come upon "the children of disobedience",[1] but also to relieve us from sorrow, danger and life's temptations in general.

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[1] Eph. 5,6

The last petition, which is heard very often in all the services follows: **"Help us; save us; have mercy on us; and keep us, O God, by Thy grace..."**

Then the familiar exclamation follows: **"Calling to remembrance our All-Holy, Immaculate, Most Blessed and Glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, with all the Saints, let us commend ourselves and each other and all our life unto Christ our God"**.

After we have prayed and asked God for so many things, the Mother Church, through the Celebrant priest, urges us to entrust ourselves and all the brothers to the Lord, but through the intercessions of the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos and all the Saints.

The response of the faithful is: **"To Thee, O Lord"**. Yes, Lord. We put our trust in You. Our whole life belongs to You.

And the Litany of Peace concludes with the exclamation: **"For unto Thee are due all glory, honor and worship to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".**

All the Prayers and petitions of the Divine Liturgy end up in a doxological reference to the Holy Trinity. The references are in fact triune, for our God is also Triune.

Immediately the **Antiphons** follow.

- After the priest's exclamation **"For unto Thee are due all glory, honor and worship..."** the first Antiphon is chanted with verses taken from Psalm 102 "Bless the Lord, O my soul..." and the 'ephymnion' (an hymn of praise) "by the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us".
- The second Antiphon is chanted after the priest's exclamation, **"for Thine is the might, and Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory..."** with verses taken from Psalm 145 "Praise the Lord O my soul..." and the ephymnion "Save us, O Son of God who art risen from the dead or who art wondrous in the saints..." At the end of this Antiphon the Justinian hymn "the Only-begotten Son..." is chanted
- The third Antiphon comes after the priest intones the petition **"For Thou art a good and philanthropic God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory..."**. These verses are taken from the Psalter and Sunday's Apolytikion or that of any great Feast or of the Saint that is being celebrated.

In the past there were the Psalms and **Prophecies**. In the Psalms the Messianic ones, which preannounced the Coming of Christ one earth, used to dominate.

All of them together - **Antiphons, Prophecies and Psalms** - tell us that Christ the Redeemer and Lord, the Messiah, is still veiled completely in the Holy Prothesis through the Holy Gifts.

After the third exclamation the priest takes the Gospel book from the Holy Table and as the candle-bearer, which symbolizes the Honorable Forerunner and the hexapterygon (the hexapteryga angel), which symbolize the heavenly Powers, are proceeding, the priest makes the **Small Entrance**, while at the same time he whispers the Prayer of the Entrance.

The Gospel book is held at the same level with his face, in order to be shielded by Christ, the Lord that is to come. It is Christ's entrance into the world. With the Prayer, the Celebrant priest asks God that Angels and Archangels may come to divine Worship, so that they may concelebrate with us.

"Wisdom. Stand upright", says the priest in the Small Entrance. **"Wisdom"** refers to the Gospel, which is our Lord Jesus Christ, the true wisdom that "descendeth from above".[1] **"Stand upright"** refers to the faithful. Standing with great reverence in order to receive God's wisdom that has been revealed to us. **"Stand upright"**; so that Christians may lift up their minds and open the eyes of their soul to see that the Lord Who is Present inside the Church Temple is attended by Angels as He is entering with them in the Holy Altar, so that the Divine Liturgy may be served.

After the words **"O come let us worship and fall down before..."** the priest enters the Holy Altar Table and places the Gospel book on the Holy Altar Table on top of the Antiminsion, while at the same time the Apolytikions are being chanted: the Resurrection Dismissal Hymns or the day of the Feast, of the Saints of the day, that of the Church Temple and the Kontakion.

Immediately the Trisagion (Thrice-Holy) hymn with the words **"Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us"**, follows.

The Fathers of the Church tell us that this Thrice Holy Hymn was taken, on the one hand from the Angels above and on the other from David's Psalms. That is to say, it is mixed. It was combined by our Church and dedicated to the Holy Trinity: "**Holy God,** the Father without beginning, **Holy Mighty,** the Son Co-Beginningless. **Holy Immortal,** the All-Holy Spirit, have mercy on us".

The word **"Holy"** that is said thrice is taken from the angelic hymns in Prophet Isaiah's vision in the sixth chapter ("Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Sabaoth...") while the words **God, Mighty** and **Immortal** are taken from David who says: "My soul thirsted for God, the mighty, the living" (that is to say, Immortal).[2] This is how **"Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal"**

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[1] Jam. 3,15

[2] Psalm 41,2

came about. The Fathers later added the supplication **"have mercy on us"**, on the one hand, in order to reveal that the Old is in accordance with the New Testament, and on the other hand, the union between Angels and people. We are united with the Angels into one Church, one faith, one Worship, into one incessant hymnology...

While the Thrice Holy hymn is being chanted, the Celebrant on the one hand reads a lengthy Prayer and on the other hand makes certain movements in the Holy Altar. He moves from the Holy Altar Table to the Holy Prothesis and again to the Bishop's Throne, in other words the Synthronon, which is behind the Holy Altar Table; (when there is no Synthronon, he once again heads towards the Holy Altar Table). These movements symbolize the cyclical movements of the Cherubim around the heavenly triune Throne. Thus, through the Angelic Thrice-Holy hymn and the angelic movements in the Holy Altar, we live and experience the event of concelebration of heaven and earth.

When the Celebrant goes towards the Holy Prothesis with outspread hands, he glorifies the Lord Who comes to this world for our salvation, and says, **"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"**. The priest then faces the throne at the high place or the Holy Altar and with elevated hands with fear and trembling but also with gladness says, **"Blessed art Thou on the throne of the glory of Thy kingdom, who art enthroned upon the Cherubim, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen"**.[1]

Nevertheless, the Prayer that the Celebrant Priest reads as the Thrice-Holy hymn is being chanted is the following, **"O Holy God, who restest in the Holy Place..."**.

At the end of the Thrice-Holy hymn the two appointed **Readings**, the Epistle and the Gospel, follow.

With the Little Entrance and the Gospel that appears in front of the priest's face, the Lord's coming and revelation to the world is declared. Yet, His revelation was silent. For this reason the Gospel book is closed. When does the Lord speak? He speaks through the holy Readings, first through the Epistle and then through the Gospel.

The **"Prokeimenon"**, which are psalm verses, an echo of the readings of the Old Testament, are heard before the Epistle reading. To every prokeimenon the words **"let us attend"** are heard, this means that we MUST pay attention; pay attention to what? Pay attention to the wisdom of the Epistle reading. It is wisdom for it is also the word of God. For it also imparts the joyful message of our salvation.

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[1] cf. Dan. 3,54

After the Reading ends, **"Alleluia"**, which means "praise God", is chanted thrice slowly and majestically. Many associate it with the Epistle reading. However, it is not related to the reading of the Epistle but to that of the Gospel. "Alleluia" is an exclamation of joy. It is a joyful welcome to the Lord, Who comes amidst us and in the Divine Liturgy through the Gospel book.

It is also time for **censing**. Like the fragrant incense is slowly spread throughout the Church Temple, likewise, the Grace of the evangelical words enters the souls of the faithful Christians who are in the Church and who attend the Gospel reading with great reverence.

Before the Gospel reading, the priest reads a Prayer, which starts with the following words: **"Illumine our hearts, O Master who lovest mankind..."**. With this petition, we ask of our Lord the light of divine knowledge, for He, Who is the Sun of Righteousness, He can only grant it to our souls. We are in need of the light of divine knowledge that is granted through the Gospel reading, so that we may comprehend the Scriptures. Divine knowledge is the seed, which gives birth to illumination, salvation and life!

And the priest says, **"Wisdom. Stand upright. Let us hear the Holy Gospel. Peace be to all"**. **"And to thy spirit"**, the faithful respond.

The blessing of the priest with the words **"peace be to all"** is Jesus Christ's real blessing, which has its beginning at the Lord's Ascension and is expanded throughout the ages in the Church. The Lord came amidst His Disciples - "in the midst" and said: "Peace be unto you".[1] Similarly, here, the Lord Himself through the mouth of the priest says "peace be to you", "peace be to all".

The Gospel is not being read in order to simply tell us what happened "at that time", but to preach to us two things: on the one hand, to convey to us the message of the end of the world and Christ's Second Coming, and on the other hand, to trumpet the good news of our salvation through repentance!

The Readings are followed by the **Preaching**, which for practical reasons was transferred to the 'Koinonikon' (psalm verses chanted at the Divine Liturgy during the communion of the clergy). The preaching of the divine word has always been connected to Divine Worship. Preaching has always existed since ancient times until today.

Thus, our Church is characterized by two elements that are inseparable: the Gospel book and the Holy Cup; the Amvon and the Holy Altar Table; the ministry of the word and Divine Liturgy; the word of God and Holy Communion.

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[1] Jn. 20,19

The **Ektenia of Fervent Supplication** comes after the Readings and the preaching; it is a persistent and fervent supplication towards God for His faithful people, clergy, and laity, the living and the departed.

To every supplication the faithful respond by saying **"Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy"** three times.

Amidst the spiritual beauty of Orthodox Worship, we Celebrant priests pray to God for the reverent Orthodox christians, the bishop, the priests, the deacons, the monks and all our brotherhood in Christ. We then ask Him to grant us life, peace, health and salvation; to protect us and pardon all of our sins. Not only our own but those of all pious Christians, who dwell in our city, of the Church wardens, donors, benefactors together with their families. Next, we pray to Him for the ever-memorable founders of the Church Temple and for all our Orthodox christian departed brethren, no matter where they may have reposed. Finally, we pray for those who work, labor and serve the Church Temple and the faithful who are present. The Ektenia supplication concludes with a triune doxology.

Following the Ectenia supplication we proceed to the **"Liturgy for the Catechumens"**, that is to say, to a small part of the Divine Liturgy, through which the Church prepares the Catechumens for Illumination and Baptism, where the Church prays for them.

Today, Catechumens are considered mainly the infants of Orthodox christians that have not been baptized as well as many of the foreigners of another faith or the heterodox. The Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts is where the supplications of the faithful and the Prayers of the Catechumens are being overly stressed.

Up to this point, the Catechumens also have the right to take part. Next, there is a liturgical process with their withdrawal from the Church Temple so that the Liturgy of the Faithful may continue.

The **Liturgy of the Faithful** begins with the phrases **"As many as are of the faithful..."** and after two very familiar and brief petitions the Celebrant priest concludes with the word **"wisdom"**. This declares that what will take place shortly is a sample of God's wisdom for the salvation of the people. Immediately the First Litany of the Faithful is read: **"We give thanks unto Thee, O Lord God of Hosts, who hast made us worthy to stand...".**

With this Prayer the priest expresses his thanksgiving, both his own and that of the faithful, for the great honor being granted to him by God, to be standing at this awesome moment before the all-holy Altar. Moreover, he gives thanks to God for making him worthy of taking refuge in His compassions, for "[his own] sins and the ignorance of the people." This last phrase declares that priests commit sins, whereas people are in ignorance.

That is to say: people commit sin without knowing the truth of the gospel this is why they "shall be beaten with few stripes". Nevertheless, clergy of every rank also commit sin although they know the commandments of the gospel, therefore they "shall be beaten with many stripes".[1]

As we continue the second Prayer of the Faithful begins with the words: **"Again and oftentimes we fall down before Thee and beseech Thee, O good One who lovest mankind..."**. In other words: Again and many times more we fall down before You Lord, Who are good and loves mankind, in order to incline and hear us, as You clean our souls and bodies from every corruption of the flesh and spirit...

This Prayer concludes with the exclamation which is heard in the Divine Liturgy only once: **"That guarded always by Thy might we may ascribe glory unto Thee to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen".**

As soon as this exclamation ends, the Cherubic hymn is chanted slowly and majestically: **"Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing the Thrice-Holy Hymn to the life-giving Trinity, lay aside all wordly cares. That we may receive the King of all invisibly escorted by the Angelic hosts. Alleluia".**

With the **Cherubic hymn** the Church is inviting us to prepare ourselves in order to receive the King of Glory, who is entering into the Holy City. She is inviting us to prepare ourselves and go with Him on the path of Martyrdom and stay by His side at the Cross on Golgotha together with His All-Holy (Panagia) Mother and His beloved Disciple.

"Let us set aside, according to the hymn, every wordly care for we are about to welcome the King of all." That is to say, with the Cherubic hymn the Church urges us to exit from all the cares of this world, so that we may be able to make the greatest entrance in the place where our Lord Jesus Christ is present.

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[1] Luk. 12,47-48

The **Sacred Chrysostom** assures: "The soul of a Christian who has not learned how to estrange himself from the cares of this world in Divine Worship and in fact, during the Cherubic hymn, the Consecration of the Holy Gifts and Holy Communion, will never be able to wonder at heavenly things...Mind and heart shall not be made radiant by the inconceivable majesty of the heavenly Altar and the angelic hymns".

The multitudes of heavenly Commanders, who are present in the Divine Liturgy, co-chant with us.When the soul of the congregation becomes angelic, then it can be caught up by the heavenly Commanders in the Jerusalem Above.

Apart from this well-known Cherubic hymn, our Church also uses other Cherubic hymns (in the Pre-sanctified Divine Liturgies of the Great Lent, on Great and Holy Thursday and on Great and Holy Saturday).

While the Cherubic hymn is being chanted, the Celebrant priest who stands before the Holy Altar Table reads the Prayer silently: **"No one who is bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy..."**. This Prayer is exclusively said for the Celebrant Priest, for himself. It is - in a way - a personal confession, of the most powerful and most divinely inspired Prayers of the Divine Liturgy. Here Christ's majesty and love for mankind are being stressed, but also the misery of the man- priest who is bold enough to draw near the Holy Altar Table and minister the dread Mysteries.

At the end of the Prayer, moved the liturgist who censes around the Holy Altar Table, the Holy Prothesis, the holy icons on the Iconostasis, the whole Church Temple and the people, while at the same time he recites the **50th Psalm**; the psalm of repentance. On Resurrection days or on Sundays, prior to the psalm he also says, **"In that we have beheld the Resurrection of Christ..."**.

Having completed the censing, he makes three prostrations and venerates the Holy Table while he says, **"O God, be gracious unto me a sinner"**. Afterwards, he faces the people and bows in a simple, humble way speaking out in a loud voice: **"Forgive, O God Lord, those who hate us and those who love us"**. These words address God, for the people of God. The priest's liturgical words are a special blessing that is spread around the whole congregation, thus, it would be a good idea for every faithful who sees the priest's bow to reciprocate, that is to say, to bow his head and receive with gratitude the Celebrant's beneficial words.

Immediately after the priest goes to the Table of Offerings, in order to take the Holy Gifts and hold the Great Entrance. First, he venerates the Holy

Gifts; he takes the "Aer" and placing it on his shoulders - or that of the deacon's - says: **"Lift up your hands unto the Holies, and bless the Lord"**. As he takes up the Holy Diskos he says: **"God hath gone up in jubilation, the Lord with the voice of the trumpet"**. Then as he takes up the holy Cup, he adds, **"I will take the cup of salvation, and I will call upon the Name of the Lord"**. Simultaneously, the holy chanters sing from the Cherubic hymn the part that says **"That we may receive the King of all..."** and so the **Great Entrance** begins!

The censer, the lit lanterns and the hexapteryga together with the Cross, precede the Holy Gifts. During the Great Entrance we notice the following points:

- **First:** The carrying of the Holy Gifts via the Holy Church Temple from the Holy Prothesis to the Holy Altar.
- **Second:** The thief's cry on the cross. **"May the Lord our God remember all of you (and all pious Orthodox Christians) in His kingdom, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages"**, taken from "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom".
- **Third:** The reception of the Holy Gifts by the faithful.
- And **fourth:** Their placing on the Holy Altar Table.

According to our Church Fathers there are four spiritual portrayals and mystagogical symbolisms which are at the same time also a living act of the Great Entrance.

◆ The **first** thing that is portrayed by the Great Entrance, is the Lord's triumphant journey and entrance from Bethany to Jerusalem, on Palm Sunday, where He is about to "be crucified for the salvation of the world".

◆ **Second:** it portrays the way to martyrdom from the Praetorium to Golgotha.

When a hierarch serves the liturgy, the "omophorion" (wide, outer Episcopal stole) which precedes, is the lost sheep, for the sake of which Christ suffers martyrdom and dies on the Cross. When the priest serves, then the "Aer", he bears on his shoulders, is the lost sheep, the sinful person: me, you, all of us. But at the same time we are also portraying the Cherubim: **"Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim"**. Thus, as the Cherubim and as sinners, we receive Christ the Savior and we escort Him in a noetic way up to Golgotha together with the angelic Powers! All these are BEING HELD during the Great Entrance!

◆ **Third:** The Great Entrance portrays the divine Drama on Golgotha, the Unnailing and mainly the Burial. At this point, the priests are transformed into Nicodemus and Joseph from Arimathea; in addition the congregation represents the Myrrh-bearing women. This is also testified by the troparion on Great and Holy Friday, which is whispered by the priest as soon as he places the Holy Gifts on the Holy Altar Table: **"The noble Joseph, when he had taken down Thine Immaculate Body..."**

♦ The **fourth** spiritual symbolism and portrayal of the Great Entrance is given to us by **Saint Symeon of Thessalonica**. He tells us that the Great Entrance portrays the Second great Coming of Christ.

Having placed the Holy Gifts on the Holy Altar Table, the priest then censes them while saying the concluding verses of the 50th psalm three times: **"Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar"**. This means that the Comforter walks with the angelic Powers who are escorting Christ as He is going up to Golgotha. Symbolically, He is seen in the fire, in the incense and in the smoke's fragrance. The fire indicates His Divinity, while the fragrant smoke indicates His Presence, which came invisibly and fragranced us through the mystical and bloodless Sacrifice and Worship.

Next, the **Litany of Supplication** begins with the words: **"let us complete our prayer unto the Lord"**. What follows are seven petitions, which complete the supplications that have been read up to this point. They refer to the Precious Gifts, to every day of our lives, to the Guardian Angel of our soul, to the forgiveness of sins, to what is good and **profitable** for our soul, to the remaining time and ending to our life, so it may be **"christian, painless, blameless and peaceful"**, and also for a good defense. What follows is the supplication: **"Calling to remembrance our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate, Most Blessed and Glorious Lady Theotokos..."** and immediately after the priest reads the following Prayer in a low voice, **"...O Lord God Almighty..."**

This Prayer is called "The Prayer of the Proskomedia". With this Prayer the priest acknowledges and confesses God's Almightiness and Holiness and prays that, on the one hand, He may accept the supplications of the sinful and on the other, enable the priests to serve the liturgy for themselves and the people of God; and finally that the Holy Spirit may overshadow the celebrants, the Precious Gifts and the people.

However, all this is realized only through the compassions of the Son and God the Word, thus he exclaims: **"Through the compassions of Thine Only-Begotten Son, with Whom Thou art blessed, together with Thine All-holy and Good and Life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages".** And the people respond: **"Amen"**.

The priest turns and faces the people and as he blesses them cruciform, he says: **"Peace be to all"**.

And the people respond: **"And to Thy spirit"**.

And now that he is inviting the people to exchange the kiss of peace, the Celebrant priest once again says the words "Peace be to all". The peace

in one's soul, God's peace from above within us, is a prerequisite for us to be able to receive Christ through Holy Communion. And something else: peace is the only way to true love.

Our soul's peaceful condition is shown in a specific way: with love's embrace or with the holy kiss of peace. This is why the celebrant urges in a loud voice: **"Let us love one another, that with one accord we may confess"**. The kiss of peace begins - today this kiss only takes place among the Celebrant priests in the Holy Altar.

In the ancient Church and Catacombs all the Christians together used to give the kiss of peace the same way, later men and women separately. This embrace and kiss of peace is not a simple liturgical symbolism, but a holy work, a ministry, a liturgical experience. It is an act of love and faith, but also proof that bearing malice, wickedness, selfishness and all evil have been exiled from within us.

With the words "Let us love one another, that with one accord we may confess", the people through the holy chanters respond as they are chanting: **"Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the Trinity, one in essence and undivided"**. It is a brief and epigrammatic confession of the Christian faith. The response that comes from the people shows that it is not a vague, impersonal and abstract faith, but specific and personal, just as it is described in the twelve articles of the Symbol of Faith. It is the faith in the Holy Trinity, in God the Word's incarnation, in the holy Church and Her Mysteries.

At this moment earth, through Divine Worship and love's embrace, is united with heaven. Angels and Archangels make contact and rejoice together with the faithful Christian congregation. The Militant Church with the Triumphant becomes One Flock, with the One Shepherd, Christ. This is why, it confesses: **"I believe in one God, Father Almighty..."** That is to say, the **SYMBOL OF FAITH** begins after the priest has made the following forewarning recommendation with a loud voice: **"The doors, the doors. In wisdom let us attend"**.

"The doors, the doors" has to do with the Church Temple's exit doors. May the Church Temple's doors be guarded, according to "APOSTOLIC INJUNCTION", in case an unbeliever or heretic or uninitiated person enters. Every Church Temple is a holy place, an Angelic place, it is a place of Saints and Martyrs; the place of dreadful Golgotha; the place of Christ! The Place of God! Heaven! No one has the right to enter and exit as one wishes. There is order and the fear of God.

"The doors, the doors". This exhortation has both a metaphorical and allegorical sense. Our bodies, those of Christians, according to the Holy

Scripture, are "the temple of God".[1] This Temple's windows are its senses. If we are not being careful with these windows, the secret chambers of the soul, the man within, can be easily corrupted. That is to say, **"the doors, the doors"** means Attention to our senses and thoughts and concentration on the wisdom of THE SYMBOL OF FAITH and of the Holy Anaphora, which follow.

While the Symbol of Faith is being recited, the priest lifts the "Aer's veil with both hands and gently waves it over the Holy Gifts. In this way, the triumph of our faith, which is Christ's Resurrection from the dead, with such signs as the earthquake, the stone that was rolled away and the empty tomb, are being declared. And something else: the Aer's veil is lifted and waved, so that it may be revealed to the Militant Church and the eyes of the faithful, the inconceivable and indescribable Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Gifts.

The recitation of the SYMBOL OF FAITH ends with the word **"Amen"**.

Here "Amen" has a certifying meaning. That is, all the Dogmas that are included in the Symbol of Faith are true, living and definite. They are truths that grant life everlasting.

After the word, "Amen" the Celebrant priest exclaims with a loud voice: **"Let us stand aright. Let us stand with fear. Let us attend, that we may offer the Holy Oblation in peace"**. This exhortation like the others that follow is the preliminary stage of the Holy Anaphora. In other words, we are gradually proceeding to the more dreadful part of Divine Worship: the consecration of the Holy Gifts.

"Let us stand aright". This archangelic exhortation must always be heard within us. "Let us stand aright"! We refer to it as archangelic for it was first trumpeted by the Archangel Michael during Lucifer's fall. Since we live in this world, which is filled with temptations, scandals and malice, demons and wicked people they shall never cease to urge us to evil-doing. Therefore, we must resist. We must take heed and "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling",[2] according to the divinely inspired message of the Apostle Paul.

"Let us attend... the Holy Oblation", means that the Church is inviting us to pay attention to and honor the **Holy Anaphora** with fear and trembling. It is called Holy Anaphora, for our rational worship from our earthly Altar shall ascend and be offered to the heavenly Altar. It is called "Anaphora" for it is brought up; it ascends and goes to heaven.

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[1] I Cor. 3,16

[2] Phil. 2,12

In the exclamation "let us stand aright..." the people respond: **"A Mercy of peace, a Sacrifice of praise"**, which means that we really offer the Holy Anaphora from within our heart with peace and love both towards God and our brethren.

Following the holy chanters' response the Celebrant Priest comes out to the Beautiful Gate and blesses the people cruciform saying: **"The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all"**. This exclamation is considered to be an apostolic blessing for it is taken from the Apostle Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians (13,13). The Apostle wishes the Christians in Corinth wholeheartedly that the Grace of Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit may always be with them. These gifts are priceless! They are heavenly treasures! The Christian who has obtained these gifts is not afraid of anyone: the devil, or death, or the world, or his bad self, or sin. He is invincible. With this apostolic blessing the Dogma of the Holy Trinity is also being proclaimed.

In this triune and apostolic blessing that is addressed by the Priest to the congregation, the people respond through the holy chanters: **"And with thy spirit"**. In other words, what you have wished for us we also wish for you.

Immediately after, as the priest lifts up his arms looking at the Dome's Almighty God he says in a loud voice, **"Let us lift up our hearts"**. The people respond: **"We lift them up unto the Lord"**. Our hearts must tend towards heaven, for the soul only through the Holy Spirit and transformed by the triune apostolic blessing that preceded will be able to ascend "up into a high mountain",[1] wherefrom he shall see and enjoy the Master's immortal Table of eternal life.

The preliminary stage of the Holy Anaphora ends where its main part begins. The whole Holy Anaphora is a unified Prayer. It commences with the phrase **"let us give thanks unto the Lord"** or even better with the words **"It is meet and right"** and ends with the exclamation: **"And the mercies of our great God..."** However, this unitary Prayer of the Holy Anaphora is separated into four parts in order to utter certain exclamations also to cense and chant "It is meet..." These are:

- **First:** The Thanksgiving Prayer and the Triumphal Hymn
- **Second:** The remembrance of the Mystical Supper
- **Third:** The invocation of the Holy Spirit for the Consecration of the Precious Gifts
- And **fourth:** The commemoration of the living and the departed persons.

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[1] Mat. 17,1

After the holy chanters chant the phrase **"We lift them up unto the Lord"**, the priest faces the Lord's icon bowing low and exclaims, **"Let us give thanks unto the Lord"**. In addition, the holy chanters respond: **"It is meet and right"**. "It is meet and right and appropriate for us to offer this rational Worship". Immediately the Celebrant reads the Thanksgiving Prayer: **"It is meet and right to hymn Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks unto thee... etc. for Thou art God ineffable** (for You are God Whom we are unable to describe), **inconceivable, invisible..."**.

As we go along the following points are being stressed: the creation of man out of nothing, his fall but also the way in which he was saved by the Lord's incarnation, so that he may be ultimately transferred to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Then we give our thanks unto God for all of His benefits - visible and invisible. However, we thank Him especially, for the fact that He deigns to accept our rational Worship that is to say, the Divine Liturgy offered by our all-wretched hands. Moreover, He accepts to be served by us on the Holy Altar Table, even though there are thousands and myriads of Angels and Archangels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim inside the Holy Church Temples and in heaven, for which the Prayer says: **"Singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming and saying"**.

What do the heavenly Powers of Angels "shout, proclaim, and say"? Our holy chanters also chant it: **"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest"**. This hymn is called "Triumphal" for it praises Christ's victory against death and the devil. It is also the joining together of two hymns: on the one hand of the Thrice-Holy angelic hymn, which the Prophet Isaiah heard, and on the other, of the Israelites' hymn with which the Lord was received as the former were holding palms on their hands, during His entrance in Jerusalem.

During the Triumphal hymn, the Priest, overcome with holy fear, continues to read the Holy Anaphora; this part is considered to be the preliminary stage of the MYSTICAL SUPPER: **"With these blessed Powers... Who, when he had come and had fulfilled all the dispensation for us, in the night in which he was betrayed or, rather, gave himself up for the life of the world, took bread in His holy and immaculate and blameless hands; and when he had given thanks and blessed it and hallowed it and broken it, he gave it to His holy Disciples and Apostles, saying..."**.

This reading of the Holy Anaphora refers to the institution of the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, that is, to the Mystical Supper of Great and Holy Thursday. It is called **"Mystical"**, not because it took place secretly, but because Christ initiated His Disciples to something extremely great. The word "mystical" derives from the noun "initiated" which derives from the verb

"to initiate". That is to say, our Lord Jesus Christ revealed and taught and presented before the eyes of His twelve Apostles that the Mystery of His Sacrifice on the Cross has already taken place.

Therefore, the Supper of the night of Great and Holy Thursday is called "Mystical", for the Lord initiated His Apostles and through the Apostles, all of us in the saving Sacrifice. In this Supper Christ ministered the Sacrifice on Golgotha. With the Mystical Supper, the Fathers tell us that the Lord, in a way that cannot be perceived by the human mind, anticipates the events of His Betrayal, of His Arrest, of His Trial, of His Passion, of Golgotha and of His Sacrifice on the Cross. Furthermore, He anticipates all these events for they are present in the nourishment of His All-Holy Body and His All-Precious Blood.

"Eat; this is my Body; and drink; this is my Blood. I am the slain Lamb. The Lamb, that takest away the sin of the world". Christ talks to us in this way for the Sacrifice has already taken place and continues to take place here with our Divine Liturgy!

And the priest exclaims: **"Take, eat. This is my Body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins"**.

The people: **"Amen"**.

The priest (with a low voice): **" And likewise after supper, he took the cup, saying:** (Aloud:) **Drink of this, all of you. This is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins"**.

The people: **"Amen"**.

199. Once, a married priest was holding a five year-old boy, his own child, by the hand, as they were going to Church for the Vesper Service.

As the small child was walking with his father he was talking nonstop, until completely unexpected he posed the following question:

- Why, daddy, in the Divine Liturgy, when you are about to consecrate Holy Communion, do you cry all the time...? And then you ascend as you fly up in the sky and again you descend holding lots of fire in your hands?

And why is it that first you put it on the bread and then in the Holy Cup with the wine?

- Why is it that you don't get burnt? I have never seen your hands burnt!

That holy father stopped astonished, speechless and scared as he then asked his child:

- When did you see all of this, my little one?

- Well, the day before yesterday, on Sunday! The small boy answered.

And then the priest tells his child in a very serious tone:

- My little one, be careful not to say these things to anyone until I

die. Do you hear? No one!!!

- Okay, daddy... Look... I have my fingers crossed! He made the sign of the Cross with his little fingers and kissed it.

The same small child told me about these things when he was already a grown fifty year-old man, concerning his father who was a priest.

This true story has its own spiritual weight that was mentioned. When the priest's son finished his father's story, he added:

- These days, father, I committed a sin for I condemned two priests for their bad practices, as I was informed. Yes, I condemned them; I cursed them and compared them with my father who was a holy priest... So, last night I dreamt of my father who was as bright as the sun!!! He gave me a serious look and said in an austere tone:

- Are you not aware of the fact that by condemning those two priests you in fact condemn your own father? Or do we not all make mistakes? And when, my child, you condemn any priest, as I have told you many times, it is as if you are condemning God Himself for making that person a priest!

Then the son of that holy priest started crying! I was so astonished that I remained speechless.

Then, I asked him whether I had his permission to tell this most awesome liturgical experience, anonymously.[1]

May God have mercy on us and on me a wretched priest, who has written so many things in this book, for "the one who knew and wrote and **DID NOT** do shall be beaten with many stripes".

The Mystery of the Holy Eucharist is not repeated, but continued. It is as if it is being held now! The most awesome thing of all is that we are not the ones who are serving the Mystery of the Divine Liturgy, Christ is! We priests simply minister, whereas the Lord is the One that offereth and is offered. Christ is present now and then...He is "the One Who extends to the ages". The Bread and Wine, He is Christ Himself, Whose Flesh we eat and Blood we drink...

"Take, eat...Drink of this, all of you...". The Lord's words are called instituted words, for with these words "the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist was founded, delivered and instituted".

He referred to His Body as **"broken"**. And to His Blood: **"shed"**. These words are in the present tense. This means that His Body is being cut and His Blood is being shed NOW. Not only once, but FOREVER!

As soon as the Lord's instituted words end, the Celebrant with a low voice says ("prays inaudibly"): **"Having in remembrance, therefore, this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the**

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[1] Personal notes

Gross, the Grave, the Third-Day Resurrection, the ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming...".

We live everything, both the past and the future in the present. Hence, in the words **"and all those things that have come to pass for us"** not only belong the remembrance of the saving commandment of the Mystical Supper ("Take, eat... Drink of this all of you..."), the Sacrifice on the Cross, Death, the Unnailing, the Sacred Burial, the Descent into Hades, the crushing of death through the third-day Resurrection, the Ascension, the Sitting at the right hand..., but also Christ's Second glorious Coming and the divine Blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is what the phrase "and all those things that have come to pass for us" means.

Since all of those things fill our hearts with infinite gratitude, we cry out: **"Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee in behalf of all and for all"**. This means that we offer God the gifts that He offered us through His creation, "putting on them the seal of our gratitude".

The gifts for the Divine Liturgy ("prosphoron" and "nama", bread and wine for the Holy Eucharist) are not an offer of gratitude towards God from only a few Christians, that is of those who bring them but also of the whole creation. And thus, creation, which is the Triune God's creation and is represented by the Precious Gifts, is returned or rather is once again offered to God by us. However, God gives them back to us, not only as Holy Eucharist, but also as a gift and Divine Grace for our spiritual life, that is to say, as immortal nourishment **"for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting"**

"Thine own of Thine own..." the Celebrant exclaims and the people respond: **"We hymn Thee, we bless Thee, we give thanks unto Thee, O Lord. And we pray unto Thee, O our God"**. The holiest hymn of the people at the most central part of the Divine Liturgy refers to the Holy Trinity: **"We hymn Thee"**, God the Father. **"We bless Thee"**, Son the Word. **"We give thanks unto Thee"**, the Holy Spirit. God - the Father is the one for Whom the Anaphora is being ministered. The Son and Word is the One, Who is being sacrificed, and the Holy Spirit is the One Who consummates the Sacrifice of the Church.

"Thine own of Thine own..." and the Celebrant Priest takes the Holy Gifts, he takes up the holy Diskos in his right hand and the holy Cup in his left hand, with his right hand over the left in crosswise fashion. He elevates them up high and says with a loud voice: "Thine own of Thine own..." he makes the sign of the Cross in the air. Then he places them down. **"In behalf of all"** means according to that which You command. **"And for all"**: and for all that, You did for us.

With the exclamation **"Thine own of Thine own..."** the Church cries to us that the Lord is before us, therefore our heart must be contrite, must bend down, and bow, for it is sinful, and then the neck and knees must bend.

Hence, we come to the holiest and most dreadful moment of the Divine Liturgy: the Consecration of the Holy Gifts. Following the exclamation

"Thine own of Thine own…", the Celebrant Priest bows his head low and says in a low voice the climax of the Holy Anaphora: **"Again we offer unto Thee this rational and bloodless worship and beseech Thee and pray Thee and supplicate thee: Send down thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here spread forth: And make this bread the precious Body of Thy Christ; Amen. And that which is in this cup, the precious Blood of Thy Christ; Amen. Changing them by Thy Holy Spirit; Amen. Amen. Amen"**.

It is a dread and inconceivable moment… The people also take part, by beseeching in total silence and calm the All-Holy God mystically, with the prayer "Lord, have mercy… Lord, have mercy… Lord, have mercy..."

Here, we notice something very significant: The priest asks God - the Father, so that the Holy Spirit may first come to all of us; both priests and the people - and then to the Precious Gifts. Why? For, if the Holy Spirit does not descend first on us, how are you people and we priests to become worthy so that we may offer this dreadful and bloodless Sacrifice to the All-Immaculate God? That is to say, as Bread and Wine shall shortly be converted into the Body and Blood of Christ, similarly, we must all first cleanse ourselves, be sanctified, transfigured, converted, go through divine transformation, the good transformation, the blessed transformation of the soul and body. For, unfortunately, most of the time we are strangers and mere spectators before this dreadful Sacrifice on the Cross not its partakers and communicants. And something else: During this holiest moment of Divine Conversion the Celebrant priest - including the most unworthy- is the total ruler of the Church.

As soon as the holy chanters end with the words **"We hymn Thee…"** it would be good to keep one minute of silence. This silence contributes to the piercing of the soul, to its compunction and tearing!

Following the Consecration the Celebrant mystically says, **"That to those who shall partake thereof they may be unto cleansing of soul, unto forgiveness of sins, unto the communion of the Holy Spirit, unto the fulfillment of the Kingdom of heaven and unto boldness toward Thee, not unto judgment or unto condemnation".**

Consecration is complete! Why is that? What is its purpose? These Precious Gifts have become the Body and Blood of Christ so that the clergy and laity may partake of It. Also, may Holy Communion contribute to those who partake of It so that they may be attentive and watchful, so that their sins may be forgiven, so that they may be in communion with the Holy Spirit, so that they may be heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven and have the boldness to approach God, so that they may not be judged or condemned. This is what the Prayer says.

Next, the Celebrant says: **"Again we offer unto Thee this rational worship for all those who in faith have gone before us to their rest: Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers,**

Evangelists, Martyrs, Confessors, Ascetics and every righteous spirit which has completed this life in faith".

In conclusion, as the Celebrant is censing the consecrated Holy Gifts, Christ's Body and Blood, he cries with a loud voice that our Divine Liturgy is offered especially and primarily to our All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos: **"Especially our All-Holy (Panagia), Immaculate, Most Blessed and Glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary"**. We therefore, offer our Worship to all our Saints and mainly to our All-Holy Lady (Panagia).

Within minutes, the holy chanters chant **"It is meet..."** or some other hymn, depending on the feast day. It is truly worth it to bless and magnify our All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, for She is indeed the One who is More Spacious than the Heavens, More Honorable than the Cherubim and More Glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim.

While the appointed megalynarion (hymn of magnification) "It is meet..." is being chanted, we continue to commemorate the name of Saints: that is, of the Honorable Forerunner, the Holy Apostles, the Saint's feast day, and others. We commemorate the Saints for we consider them as God's intercessors and as His friends, as Christ's worthy imitators and as victors of evil, of wickedness, of sin, of the devil and death.

After that, our brethren, who have fallen asleep are commemorated through the **Diptychs** (list of the living and departed commemorated during divine services), where the Celebrant asks God to rest them "where the light of His Countenance watcheth over them". And the commemoration of the living follows; clergy and laity, all the Orthodox Church, even the rulers, who hold people's peace and security in their hands, are commemorated.

As the hymn **"It is meet..."** is being chanted you, the congregation, are able to commemorate the living and departed in a noetic way. On the one hand, for the living you should ask for the illumination and health, patience and repentance, faith and love! On the other hand, you should ask that those who have fallen asleep might rest in Abraham's bosom. You should commemorate the former and the latter in a noetic way and within you by name. The deacon who says with a loud voice as he is serving the liturgy reminds us: **"And... those whom they are remembering and of all mankind"**.

In the commemoration of the living, the bishop and his name are among the first. **"Among the first be mindful, O Lord, of our Archbishop..."** For he is in "Christ's type and place." Moreover, in these commemorations of the living the priest also refers to various categories of Christians such as the faithful who dwell in the city, those who travel by sea and by land, the sick, the captives, the prisoners, the poor, the afflicted, the merciful etc.

The epilogue of the Holy Anaphora follows with the exclamation: **"And grant us with one mouth and one heart to glorify and praise Thine All - Honorable and Majestic Name of the Father and of the Son and of the**

Holy Spirit". With one mouth and one heart we should give thanks to and glorify the Triune God's All-Holy Name.

The Holy Anaphora tells us that the Divine Liturgy is not offered by us only for the Christians who are striving in the bosom of the Militant Church but also for all the Saints and **"especially"** for the All-Holy (Panagia) Theotokos, so that She may glorify and make them radiant. However, the bloodless Sacrifice is also being offered for all those who have fallen asleep (faithful in Christ), so that they may find peace in the Light of Christ's Countenance.

As the priest is completing the Holy Anaphora, he faces the people, the congregation and offers Christ the Savior's blessing and mercy.

From this point onward to "Our Father...", a series of petitions and a Prayer intervene. It is a supplementary repetition of what has been said up to now. For, we ask the Lord God so that the sanctified Precious Gifts may also impart us with the sanctification that they have received. Furthermore, that God Who has received these holy Gifts in His all-heavenly noetic Altar, may send us in return Divine Grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. With the Prayer that follows, we ask God to make us worthy of receiving Holy Communion with a clear conscience so that our sins may be forgiven, and together with the communion of the Holy Spirit so that we may inheinher the Kingdom of Heaven.

After that the **"Our Father"** the so-called "Sunday Prayer" follows. "Our Father" is recited by all of us, for it is our Prayer and that of each one of us separately.

After we have recited the conclusion, which is also a triune doxology, the Celebrant faces the people, pacifies them and asks them to bow their heads, saying: **"Peace be to all... bow your heads unto the Lord"**. The words "Peace be to all" resembles Christ's "Peace be unto you"[1] after He was resurrected and was addressed to the Apostles and Disciples who were afraid. This means that all of our hearts should be peaceful. Not troubled consciences. Not troubled thoughts and reflections.

Straightway the Prayer of the bowing of the heads follows with the exclamation: **"Through the grace and compassions..."**.

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[1] Luk. 24,36

The second dread moment has come where the Celebrant priest "experiencing" the Holy things, is realizing a leap that is beyond this world and through which he draws near the all-heavenly Altar and is praying with a bowed head and a trembling voice saying quietly: **"Hear us, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, from Thy holy dwelling - place and from the throne of glory of Thy kingdom; and come to sanctify us, O Thou who sittest on high with the Father and art here invisibly present with us; and vouchsafe by Thy mighty hand to impart unto us Thine Immaculate Body and Precious Blood, and through us unto all the people".**

This Prayer prior to the Elevation is the third one that the Celebrant priest addresses to Christ directly, not to the Heavenly Father. (The first one is the Prayer of the Gospel, the second one is the Prayer of the Cherubic hymn and the third current one is the so-called "Prayer prior to the Elevation"). This Prayer reminds us that the Holy things here spread forth are exactly the ones that were delivered to us by the Lord on the night of Great and Holy Thursday. As a result, the Lord's presence is made direct through faith. Christ God is present! Before us! This Prayer also tells us something else that is very important: The Great and Eternal High Priest Jesus Christ Himself communes the priests and through the priests' hands He communes the people. (Thus, we lend our hands to Christ!) The priest is an instrument of God and the peoples' servant and deacon. We priests are "servants' servants".

As the Prayer reaches the end, the Priest with trembling hands and with three fingers in each hand takes hold of the Body of the Lord, elevates It slightly, makes therewith the sign of the cross and cries out loud: **"Let us attend. The Holy Things are for the holy"**. Let us be attentive! The Holy Things are for the holy.

Saint Cyril stresses this moment of the Divine Liturgy: The present Gifts are holy for they have received the descent of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, all of us are also Saints for we were made worthy of the energies of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy things are suitable for the Holy.

During the Elevation, we see the dread symbolism: that is, we see our Lord ascending while He is nailed, bruised, filled with blood, with intolerable pain on the Cross.

Since the Lord is the only Holy One and the only person that is without sin of all the people on earth, this is why our Church through the holy chanters responds: **"One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen".**

While the hymn **"One is Holy..."** is being chanted the elevated Lamb of God is being cut by the Celebrant Priest and is divided into four parts: **IC- XP- NI- CA.** Every portion is sealed with two letters and they are arranged on the rim of the holy Diskos in the form of a cross.

The moment the Priest cuts the Lamb he says very attentively and in fear: **"Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, who is divided, yet not**

disunited; who is ever eaten, yet never consumed, but sanctifieth those who partake thereof".

This indicates that no matter into how many pieces and portions the Lord's Body is being cut, the One, Undivided, and Unconsumed Lord is present in every one. If in Orthodox Churches worldwide where the Divine Liturgy is being served there are millions of portions, the whole Body of Christ, not part of It, is being imparted. The ONE and Undivided Lamb of God, the Lord, Who Sacrificed Himself on the Cross for our salvation is present even in the smallest portion. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ's Body is undivided and unbreakable on the Cross and inside the Tomb and inside the holy Cup and in the portion on the holy Spoon.

"Ever eaten, yet never consumed". What an awesome, unintelligible, incomprehensible, inexplicable Mystery! So, through the holy Cup Christ Himself is being imparted to us! Who is Christ? The Lord Who was born from the Virgin Mary as God-Man in the Person of Jesus Christ. The Lord Who taught, Who performed miracles and raised the dead. The Lord Who suffered, Who was buried and was resurrected from the dead; Who ascended into heaven and is now sitting on the throne of Glory. The Lord Whom we are awaiting in order to judge the living and the dead. This is the Lord Whose undivided Body and Blood we receive and partake!

The Priest takes the portion sealed **IC** (= Jesus) out of the four parts into which the Lamb has been cut, and places It in the holy Cup. In this way, he makes the Union of the Body with the Precious Blood and at the same time says, **"The fullness (of the Cup of Faith) of the Holy Spirit. Amen"**. That is to say, this Cup is filled with faith and the Holy Spirit. The union of Jesus Christ's two natures is being proclaimed through the union of the Body and Blood inside the holy Cup. Perfect God and perfect man into one undivided union in the Person of Jesus Christ. In addition, through the words "fullness...of the Holy Spirit" the Lord fills us with the Holy Spirit.

When the Celebrant performs the Union, he is brought boiled water, called "zeon", inside a small vessel. He blesses it and says, **"Blessed is the fervor of Thy Saints, O Lord, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen"**. That is to say, blessed is the fervent faith of God's Saints. The blessing of the warm water, indicates that the faith of Christians must be fervent and living; neither lukewarm and most importantly nor cold.

The warm water and the Lord's Blood that are united inside the holy Cup portray the Blood and the Water that came out from Jesus Christ's pierced side on the Cross which were also warm, that is to say, living not dead. Thus, with Holy Communion we touch with our lips the Lord's life-giving side, according to the Fathers.

Holy Communion then commences: First come the Priests in the Holy Altar and then the Christian congregation.**"With fear of God and faith and love, draw near"**. Next, the communion of the faithful begins **"unto the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting"**, and in fact by name, by our first name!

Divine fear, faith and love are virtues, which must dominate our souls, if we wish to be benefited and saved through Holy Communion! In fact, the benefits and gifts we receive from Holy Communion are many:

- Our union with Jesus Christ by Grace.
- The souls partake of eternity's goods starting now.
- The sense of Resurrection.
- The creation of a holy and spiritual dwelling in the hearts, deification.
- The increase in spiritual work.
- The forgiveness of sins.
- The sanctification of soul and body.
- The release from passion.
- The beauty in Christ.
- The peace from above.
- The humble spirit.
- The perfect love, the perfect mercifulness...

200. I am aware and believe that I am a poor and trivial "tiny, litlte priest". Nonetheless, many-many years ago, I saw a true man of God, a most worthy Celebrant of the Most High, who, following the Divine Liturgy, offered us in his plain and most poor "archondariki" the usual treat that consisted of a plain breakfast, and then started talking to us with words of supplication.

Within minutes and as he was talking flames of divine fire started coming out his mouth. Two things were happening at the same time: On the one hand, these divine lightings surrounded his whole being and on the other, beams of divine light were being radiated to the group of people who were present.

The eyewitnesses of this inconceivable event were four men, a six-year-old child and I, the wretched one. The rest, who were about twenty in number, did not realize what was happening. Thus, it had nothing to do with fallacy, hallucinations and fantasies, since our psychosomatic transformation that took place later on was never known before, peace giving and ecstatic. Glory be to God, there are many such worthy and gracious Orthodox priests in our Church, yet, they remain unknown due to their extreme humility.[1]

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[1] Personal notes

At the end of this praiseworthy description, I had noted the following: "...O, how much I would like to have resembled this humble Celebrant of the Most High as far as his life of nightly prayer and working of virtues are concerned... For, first, you meet God "in secret" and suffer the Divine, "touching the Divine" and then you serve the liturgy! God is Infinite and infinite are His gifts!

After Holy Communion has been completed, the priest elevates the holy Cup and exclaims: **"O God, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance".** Immediately, the holy chanters chant the appointed post-communion hymn majestically: **"We have seen the true Light. We have received the heavenly Spirit. We have found the true faith, in worshipping the indivisable Trinity; for He hath saved us"**. With this triumphal doxology the Priest returns to the Holy Altar, places the holy Cup on the Holy Table and censes It thrice saying with great reverence: **"Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens and Thy glory above all earth"**.

The verse **"We have seen the true light"**, declares the Lord's Ascension, this is why it is identified with the verses **"be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens"**. It is as if the celebrant tells the Lord: "My God, may You come back and return to Your throne of Glory, wherefrom You decended for our salvation." The chanted verses **"we have received the heavenly Spirit"** declare Holy Pentecost.

After that, the Priest, who is holding the Holy Cup in his hand, exclaims, **"Always, now and ever and unto ages of ages"**. Which means: may the Lord make us worthy to partake of Him always; both now in this life in a sacramental way, and in the next life, always united with Him in the eschatological Supper!

The following supplications come next: **"Stand upright. Having partaken of the divine, holy, immaculate, immortal, heavenly... Help us; save us... Asking that the whole day...".**

Afterwards, the priest inserts the appointed Thanksgiving Prayer: **"We give thanks unto Thee, O Master who lovest mankind, Benefactor of our souls, for Thou hast vouchsafed this day..."**. We give our thanks to God for today's Divine Worship and Holy Communion and we ask of Him to guard our life, to establish us and keep us safe from every evil doing. The Prayer's conclusion, which is also a triune doxology and refers to our life's aim, our sanctification that is, follows.

While these last petitions are being said, the Thanksgiving Prayer and the triune conclusion, the Priest "consumes the remaining holy gifts". That is, the Portions of the Theotokos, of the Saints and of the souls (living and dead),

which are on the holy Diskos, are thrown inside the Holy Cup with the Mousa (a small wide sponge), as the priest asks of God the following: **"Wash away, Lord, by Thy Holy Blood, the sins of all those commemorated through the intercessions of the Theotokos and of all Thy Saints. Amen"**. Great indeed is the commemoration of a name in the Divine Liturgy!

Later on, the **Prayer behind the Amvon**, which follows, beseeches that we may depart the Holy Church Temple in peace. With the Prayer behind the Amvon, Holy God grants us a multitude of blessings and Gifts.

Immediately, the triumphal doxology is chanted thrice: **"Blessed be the name of the Lord, henceforth and forevermore"**. May our Holy God's Name be blessed for all that took place in the Divine Liturgy and for our own Holy Communion, our own forgiveness of sins and our own sanctification. Righteous and much suffering Job has uttered this doxology.

The **Dismissal** and the distribution of the **Antidoron** follow.

The **Antidoron** is a special blessing given instead of the great Gift, Holy Communion, for those in fact who have not partaken of It. We always receive It from the Celebrant priest's hands not from the Church table for candles! Right hand is on top of the left and our palm spread open. We receive the Antidoron and kiss the right hand of the priest.

The priest closes the Beautiful Gate. In the Holy Altar later on, following Holy Communion, the Thanksgiving Prayer is read at the end of which the priest says: **"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace..."**. Now the Celebrant priest, like any other Christian who has partaken of the immaculate Mysteries, is prepared to die. This is why he exclaims the words of Saint Symeon the God-receiver: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace...For mine eyes have seen thy salvation..."[1] Symeon held the world's Savior in his arms for only a few moments, while we have received Him wholly within us.

With Holy Communion, the Lord has granted us salvation, He has clothed us with incorruption and light, with immortality and life. He raised us with Him; He made us sit with Him on the same throne on His right, already deified in His Kingdom... The Priest takes off his vestments, which means that he is no longer in need of the robe of this world, since he was clothed with Christ Himself and is prepared to die.

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[1].Luk. 2,29-30

A GOD PLEASING CRITICISM

♦ By father Theoklytos Monk Dionysiatis

I have not written any book reviews for 25 years (I have already published 170 book reviews). However, as soon as I finished reading this multi-paged book by the soul's participation, there was a need not only to give thanks but to also congratulate the reverend father, for his valuable contribution to the Church (Clergy and laity). Furthermore, I would like to promote this work as a book that should be read by every Orthodox Christian, so that they may revive the indescribable gifts that have been granted to us by the love of God.

Of course, it deals with the interpretation of the Divine Liturgy, based on the well-known Holy specialists of the Liturgy Nicholas Cabasilas and Symeon of Thessalonica. Father Stephanos analyzed the Liturgy before his congregation in a series of evening sermons. Yet, the new element that is being presented by the most reverent minister, is his speech that is full of compunction, humility, reverence, awe, gratitude and thanksgiving together with the unceasing doxology for God's splendor and the infinite love for His being that was made according to His image. Moreover, all these workings of the Holy Spirit on souls that are pure constitute common spiritual experiences... which as symbolic, dogmatic phases of the supernatural dramaturgy in the Divine Liturgy, as infinite Triune love, they succeed one another reaching the climax, which is the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. Then the souls that are receptive due to their cleanliness are made fervent by the Holy Spirit, become of one body and of one blood and thus live in Christ. Hence, it is not the ego conscience that lives but Christ as a spiritual sense that dominates and as reason that carries in the womb holy and spiritual meanings while it produces supernatural visions. The workings that God grants holy souls belong to the place where the Holy Spirit is experienced.

Father Stephanos adds a second supernatural element related to the Mystery of Holy Eucharist, which are two hundred theophanies (revelations) as uncreated energies, some of which are accompanied by infinite uncreated light and others by angelic appearances.

While sweetest Jesus many times appears immersed in His discomfiture uncreated Light, the Theotokos appears glowing in a brilliance of Triune shedding of light. Moreover, Saints are present immersed in immense light concelebrating, priests who even though are wearing flesh, and who are nonetheless Christ bearers are seen as serving in burning flames. Furthermore, the Seraphim and the Cherubim overshadow the Altar with their symbolic wings along with hosts of heavenly Angels within the Angelic created light, senior* creation is chanting incessantly and without tiring as "lights of the second rank" the hymn "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men".

Therefore, we must be grateful towards the most reverend father Stephanos both for his incarnate interpretation accompanied with experiences from the Holy Eucharist, which we attend and receive in faith all that which is served in the Mystery. However, we are also grateful for the revealing, awesome images, which "are being consummated in David's dwelling" for the Lord has condescended so that they may become known for the edification of the faithful and which in turn show sweetest Jesus' infinite love so that He may summon one Church made of Angels and humans.

To be honest, Father Stephanos must be grateful towards Mount Athos, without whose spiritual influence it would be doubtful whether he would have been able to offer spiritual work of such great magnitude while being a priest and actually married.

+ Theoklytos Monk Dionysiatis

♦ By Metropolitan Sissanio and Siatista, Anthony

Father Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos' book "EXPERIENCES DURING THE DIVINE LITURGY" aims at enlightening the People of God in a more essential and an even more genuine partaking of the Mystery of the Lord's Bloodless sacrifice, in other words, that of the Divine Liturgy and Communion with Christ the Savior.

…Therefore, this book is all about the Saints' thanksgiving experiences. It is the Divine Liturgy as the Saints experienced it throughout the ages …

It is certainly a fact that during our difficult and stormy age, which is distinguished for its spiritual famine and aridness, certain Clergy whose hearts are burning with the love of God, are experiencing the presence of the God-man before the Altar of Bloodless Sacrifice. There have always been souls who during the Divine Liturgy concelebrate with Angels and Saints and taste the unspeakable joy of the Blessed kingdom of God.

…As my modesty is one of the book's readers, I fervently congratulate the author and untiring worker of the Gospel, who is initiated in the orthodox faith and in the life of worship, the very beloved brother in Christ, Protopresbyter Father Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos, for the beautiful, and remarkable work that benefits the soul, as it is the fruit of experienced faith and life in Christ. Furthermore, I congratulate him for his laborious and many year long occupation, study, effort and research.

…May all clergy and laity who read the liturgical experiences and truths, presented in this book with a good purpose in their heart, be assisted

in the cultivation of a genuine liturgical conscientious life, by foretasting during this present life, the goods of the kingdom of God. Hence, may we all become dwellers and enjoy the things that God had always prepared "for those who love Him". Amen.

Your lowly brother in Christ,
+ Anthony Of Sissanio and Siatista

♦ By Metropolitan of Monemvasia and Sparta, Efstathios

22 - 2 - 2003

Dear father Stephanos,

Please accept my cordial thanksgiving for Your precious gift that I almost finished reading unceasingly, despite the workload.

I congratulate you, for you have interpreted the Divine Liturgy in an original way that is easy for readers to understand and that has benefited them enormously. I have never encountered a more successful interpretation of the Divine Liturgy. It is well done!

Wishing you a good Triodion, I embrace you.
Honor and love in Christ,
+ Efstathios Of Monemvasia and Sparta

♦ By Metropolitan of Nikopolis Meletios

19 - 12 -2002

Dear Father Stephanos

I express my thanksgiving for Your "experiences". I looked at it and realized, and congratulate, and pray that the fruit of Your pain love and reverence may ease many souls that conduct their life on this arid, deserted and impassible earthly period.

Please accept my wishes for the holy feasts and the New Year.
Love and embrace in Christ,
+ Meletios of Nikopolis

♦ By Hieromonk Ioannikios Kotsonis

Mount Athos - February 2003

Reverend holy brother and concelebrant
Christ is in the midst of us...

We thank you for your great book... It is going to benefit... numerous souls throughout the face of the earth, wherever the Lord of the Three-Sun Trinity Sabaoth's, Altar has been set up and wherever there is a heart that beats with a loving, divine, liturgical, eucharistic eros, the "One Who is to come" Bridegroom, as a living altar of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

With great brotherly love and profound respect
The lowest of all,
Hieromonk Ioannikios Kotsonis

♦ By Protopresbyter father Evangelos Kopanakis

Spili 23 - 6 - 2003

...In his Book, "EXPERIENCES DURING THE DIVINE LITURGY" the Reverend father First presbyter Stephanos Anagnostopoulos is being authentic, is offering us and for this reason he is worthy of our gratefulness and congratulations. In other words, in a simple, easy to understand, inductive way and with specific and brief, charming but real and shocking living experiences of the reverend Holy Clergy, he gives us the opportunity to have a deep understanding of inaccessible places, unknown to many, to familiarize ourselves with, live and receive from the Divine Liturgy and the Mystery of Holy Eucharist all the infinite, Heavenly, Divine and Saving Gifts which are offered to us by our conscientious and meritorious partaking of the paramount Mystery of our Lord's Holy Body and Precious Blood.

Around and beyond this paramount event, he clearly indicates and determines, what is our place in this divine and supernatural process, what are our obligations and duties, what are the benefits and what our heavenly privileges of both Clergy and Laity, as "concelebrants", as being "of one body and one blood"...

We respect father Stephanos Anagnostopoulos' offer as particularly significant...The book "EXPERIENCES DURING THE DIVINE LITURGY" is very useful, for each one of us Clergy or Laity. It is essential we would say, for our proper and saving stance and attitude before the Great Mystery of Holy Eucharist, thus, we wholeheartedly recommend it to every godly and devout Christian and especially to every brother Priest.

Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne
Evangelos Kopanakis
General High Priest Church Warden
Of the Holy Metropolitan of Lambi, Syvritos and Sfakia

ABBREVIATIONS

LGFCA Library of Greek Fathers and Church Authors, Apostolic Diaconate of the Church of Greece, publications, Athens 1995 and thereafter.

GCF Greek Church Fathers, Patristic publications "Gregory Palamas", Thessalonica 1972 and thereafter.

PHILOKALIA Philokalia of the Holy Fathers of Wathcfulness, Translation by A. G. Ghalitis, vol. 1-5, The Garden of Panagia,the All-Holy, publications.

PHILOKALIA Philokalia of the Holy Fathers of Asceticism and Watchfulness, Patristic publications "Gregory Palamas", Thessalonica 1983 and thereafter

P.G. Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca, J.- P. Migne, publications, Paris 1857 and thereafter

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